Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

Foreign Affairs Series

MICHELLE E. TRUITT

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: October 9, 1997

[This interview was not edited by Ms. Truitt]

Q: Today is October 9, 1997. This is an interview with Michelle Truitt. Michelle and I are old friends. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Michelle, could you start out by telling me when and where you were born and something about your family?

TRUITT: I was born on August 25, 1942, in Monticello, New York, in the heart of the Catskill Mountains. At that time the Catskills were known primarily as a summer resort, drawing people out of the New York City area and primarily from strongly Jewish communities. Consequently, I grew up on a farm, surrounded by a lot of high profile hotels, including the Concord and Grossinger's, which were indeed very active and drew a large number of people.

Q: Particularly at that time, this was known as the "Borscht" circuit.

TRUITT: It was the "borscht belt." It was the place where Jerry Lewis [well-known American comedian] became famous, along with a lot of others. In fact, I could see the hotel where he became famous from our front door. So that is where I grew up.

My father was born in the house in which I grew up. He was a farmer by profession. My mother was a schoolteacher and later a high school guidance counselor. I have one brother, who is a year older than I. That comprised our whole family.

Q: And your family name...?

TRUITT: My family or maiden name was Walker.

Q: What was it like, growing up there? Were you able to tap into this wealth of Jewish, urban life that came up to the Catskills? Or was that a world apart?

TRUITT: It was never a world apart because many of my classmates in school, in fact, were the sons and daughters of the people who operated those hotels. So what was going on in this community was always an integral part of my life.

However, the bigger influence was living only 90 miles from New York City. Consequently, we were always going to the city for a day at a time, going to the theater and going to see basketball games. Basically, until I went to college, I believed that every city was as large and as sophisticated as New York. So I grew up in what was really a very cosmopolitan area. Some 90 percent of us who graduated from our small, rural high school went on to college.

My parents traveled a lot. My whole family traveled a lot. Although I grew up in a rural area, it was hardly what you might call classically rural. However, the people I knew were a very diverse group. About half of the population was Christian and half was Jewish. So I grew up thinking that the world was this kind of mix. It was also a real eye opener to go to college and find out how many people had biases against other people that we didn't think about when we were growing up.

Q: When you were a kid, what sort of books were you reading?

TRUITT: I don't remember the books as much as I remember the newspapers and magazines. We subscribed to three newspapers every day: the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Daily News.

Q: This was a farmer's home?

TRUITT: Right. We also had a regular subscription to Fortune magazine, which I read, and Time magazine. So consequently the people at the post office used to giggle at the fact that we probably received more newspapers and magazines than everybody else in the town. So I remember that. Probably, I was the leading person in my class who followed current events because every morning before I went to school, I read the "Center Strip" [news summary] of the Wall Street Journal.

Q: What sparked this interest in current events in what was essentially a farming family?

TRUITT: I have no idea why my parents were as they were and still are. They're still very active. They had already traveled a lot before I was born. My mother grew up as a traveler with her family. My father has always been very, very interested in current events. He was a member of the local Board of Education. My mother ran for political office, so I guess that that was the kind of thing that interested them. So therefore that was what we had to read.

Q: We're in an era now in the 1990s of what are called "gender studies." I take it that you were brought up, whether a boy or a girl, to believe that you could do anything that you wanted to do. Did you feel that way or not?

TRUITT: My mother tells the story that when I was five or six years old, I got a small pocketbook as a present. She asked me what I would do with that. I said: "I'm going to save it for when I go to college." So this objective was obviously very strong in my family.

My mother was the first college graduate in her family. My father was the first high school graduate in his family. Both of them were very, very determined that we would get an education. There was never any doubt in the family that we would go to college. For that reason we needed to know a lot about what was going on.

Q: You said that something like 90 percent of your class in high school went to college. What was your high school like?

TRUITT: I started into high school in a class of about 120 students. I graduated early from high school with the class before me, which only had 36 students. So this was a rural high school. In the county where I grew up, every town had its own high school. Ours was a small high school but it was always one which was very much informed by the concept that education took you forward. Education was what would give you a better life and a good income. The teachers taught us all to go on to some form of higher education. This was the basic structure and probably the outlook of that high school. There were other high school districts in that county where, maybe, no more than two or three kids out of every class went on to college.

Q: When you were in high school, did you have any paid jobs or anything like that?

TRUITT: I always worked pretty much at home. A farm is a pretty busy place. By the time I was 14, I cleaned the house in the summer. I also mowed the lawns, one of which was large enough for baseball games. I tended the garden and did all of the cooking for the family. In fact, I ran the house every summer because, by the time I was 14, my mother's job kept her at the high school. By the time I was 16, I got a job as a telephone operator. I used to say, when somebody picked up his or her receiver, "Number please?" Later on, during the summer, I was a clerk in the post office. We had a huge increase in the population during the summer, so I was a summer hire. I did that all the way through law school, because work at the post office was one of the best paying jobs that you could get in town.

My parents were very reluctant for me to be away from home during the summer, because that was basically the only time that they ever saw me.

Q: By the time you were getting ready to graduate from high school, what did you want to do in life?

TRUITT: By the time I was 13, I told my parents that I wanted to be a lawyer. I went off to college, saying that I wanted to be a lawyer. In fact, that's what happened.

Q: Why?

TRUITT: I have no idea. [Laughter]

Q: Was there an old family lawyer in town or did you read about lawyers?

TRUITT: I can't tell you why. It probably had to do with an interest in politics. I majored in economics in college. I used to read about certain legal issues. I remember the day that the decision was announced in the case Brown Versus Board of Education.

Q: This was the case the Supreme Court decided in 1954 requiring the desegregation of the schools.

TRUITT: I remember where I sat in the classroom when this decision was announced. I remember the vote and the length of the decision. Obviously, my mind was focused on that, even though I couldn't have been very articulate on why this decision was reached.

Q: Where did you go to college?

TRUITT: I went to Goucher College in Baltimore. It was a women's college at the time. However, it also had a program which was fairly unique. It allowed juniors in high school to apply for admission. I applied for entrance as a junior and was accepted. So I did not attend senior year in high school. That was why I chose Goucher College.

Q: Was this what attracted you to Goucher College? Were you in a hurry to go to college?

TRUITT: I thought that I was ready to go to college. I left high school after only three years there, with 18 credits. You only needed 16 credits to graduate in four years. So I thought that I could go on to college right away. So off I went to Goucher, which was then one of the few colleges which allowed you to enter after only three years of high school.

Q: You attended Goucher College from when to when?

TRUITT: From 1959 through 1963.

Q: Describe Goucher College at that time, particularly when you first arrived and you looked at it with fresh eyes. What was it like? It was a women's college. What was the spirit? Then we can talk about the education you received there.

TRUITT: The spirit was primarily that of a women's college with a very southern flavor. In fact, many of my classmates came from the deep south. They wanted to see another part of the country. Goucher College was about as far north as their families would allow them to go. The Mason-Dixon Line was still north of Baltimore. [In fact, it is the border, dating back to colonial times, between Maryland and Pennsylvania.] Goucher was considered one of the best women's colleges in the country at the time. It had a rather confined campus. It had moved out of downtown Baltimore after World War II. There was a very strong feeling that families could send their daughters there and that they would be very well looked after and also would get a very fine education.

I remember thinking at the time how beautiful the college was and how the architects had paid attention when they were constructing the buildings. I still remember the day when we first drove into the campus. I thought how architecturally integrated Goucher College was. I went there sight unseen. I had applied to enter the college but had not previously visited it. So that was my first encounter with it.

Q: Well, now, a whole new era in politics was starting. Kennedy was elected President in 1960, and things really started picking up. However, you're talking about Goucher College, a school where a lot of the students came from the deep south and were young women. There was a lot of feeling at that time that young ladies who went to college would come out with an "MRS" degree. In other words, they were getting ready to be married. The south had an attitude that education was fine, but "womanly arts" were important. Did you sense that at Goucher, or was your college rather revolutionary?

TRUITT: I think that Goucher College attracted students who were indeed very mixed. If, in fact, you wanted to go on to graduate school or if you had a profession in mind in which you had an interest, Goucher College was very much interested in preparing you for one of those goals. It was also a college where, in fact, you could get a very diversified background in terms of what was truly a liberal arts education. So it satisfied the demands of a lot of young women who went there. Virtually all of the students who wanted to go to medical school and applied from Goucher College were accepted. A half dozen of us who applied for law school were all accepted. One of my best friends was accepted at Yale Law School. By the way, she hated it and left after a short time there. She had received an almost full scholarship but just decided that it wasn't for her. In the biological sciences, I remember in particular that our professors at Goucher were true experts in their field and renowned for what they knew. So it was interesting in that regard. Basically, people could do whatever they wanted.

Q: What was social life like on the campus?

TRUITT: Social life was probably about as good as it could be, considering the fact that the students were isolated. At that time it was really a hike (and still is) to get to downtown Baltimore from Towson, MD (Maryland), where the college was located. Basically, our most active social relationships were with students at Johns Hopkins University, which had all male students. Goucher was all female, and there was a lot of exchange back and forth.

For some people it was no problem to meet young men. Johns Hopkins had no football team at the time, and lacrosse was the major sport there. There were a lot of social activities. It was a very social atmosphere. However, I think that a lot of my friends later regretted that they did not go to a coeducational institution. They felt that it was much harder to have an active social life at Goucher than at other places. Other people thought that it was grand, because when you studied, you studied. When you played, you played.

Q: I think that this is one of the things that studies seem to show. That is, particularly at women's colleges, women certainly did not take a back seat to what is purported to be the attitude of male students, who are supposed to be more aggressive in classes. Certainly, you were in charge.

TRUITT: I think that was true at the time. Goucher College is now coeducational, and 20 percent of the student population is male. Within the first three years of that change, the president of the student body was a male. I think that you can see the results of this change. This is not necessarily true, but I think that it is a real phenomenon. It is true that, when I was there, the whole institution was run by women. Although we have had a male president, the college now has its second female president. It has had a female president for the last 25 years.

Q: You were at Goucher College during what I would call a generational change, marked by the election in 1960 of President Kennedy. Did you get caught up in the spirit of government service and activism? Did this affect your class?

TRUITT: No. I felt this more in law school than I did during my early years as an undergraduate. It was not something that I sensed at Goucher at all. I did not sense people taking on causes. I did not sense people saying: "Gee, golly, the Peace Corps is for me."

In fact, we looked at it in the other way. My very best friend and the godmother of my child took the Foreign Service exam. She was then 5' 0" tall, and still is, of course. She then wore size three clothing. She is now a size five. She is a small woman. She is bilingual in French and majored in international studies. She passed the Foreign Service written exam. She took the oral exam. She remembered vividly that she was told by the Foreign Service examiners: "Little girl, do you really wish to go into the Foreign Service?"

Q: My God!

TRUITT: She was the only member of my class. So she answered: "Oh, I guess not." You wouldn't find any woman now who would not say: "Excuse me? Did I hear you correctly?" To this day she remembers that exchange between her and her examiners. She is a petite woman but she is not petite in mental terms. She just went on to other things, and we all went on to other things. There was not the enthusiasm or dialogue in the way there was by the time I attended law school, from 1963 to 1966.

Q: What about integration between blacks and whites, particularly in the south? Here you were at a college largely attended by southern belles.

TRUITT: During my last year at Goucher [1962-1963] we had our first, black student. The black students at Goucher came from places like Chicago and New York City. I can remember someone's parents saying to me: "Who is that girl?" I said: "She's one of us." These parents said: "Well, I have no doubt that you would never allow her into your room!" This was a perspective of the deep south. It was a jarring change, but no more jarring than what I saw later in Ithaca, NY (New York) [at Cornell University, 1963-1966], where I was in law school.

Q: How about the students in your class at Goucher College? How did they react to racial integration? Or perhaps not to integration there, but to the racial integration movement? Were there discussions about this?

TRUITT: There were very few discussions of it on campus. The black women students who joined us did so without any trouble. It was just a very, very smooth process. However, this subject was not a matter of great discussion on the campus at that time. It just wasn't a question. You couldn't find that kind of discussion.

Q: In a way, what you are saying is that Goucher College provided you with a good education but not one which was very much plugged in to the spirit of the times, or at least what I think was the spirit of the times.

TRUITT: But it was the spirit of the times in Baltimore.

Q: Okay. [Laughter]

TRUITT: Baltimore was still a southern city. It was not particularly pushed on some issues. I can remember my roommate during my sophomore year at Goucher College. She dated a black man. She did it because she wanted to see what would happen. This bothered me because I think that if you're going to date somebody, it should be a little different from that. She came back and said: "Everyone stared at us." I said: "Well, what did you expect? This is a southern city." She was from Pennsylvania. She said: "Well, I guess that I really did expect that." I said: "Right." But this really wasn't a major issue.

Q: Then you went to law school. Had you pointed toward any law school in particular?

TRUITT: I had always wanted to go to Cornell Law School. It was the only law school I wanted to go to, because I really loved the campus at Cornell University. I wanted to go back to New York state for my graduate school education. At the time [1963], there was no law school in the state university system in New York state. Consequently, if you were a New York state resident and you went to a New York state law school, you received a New York state scholarship. So I applied to NYU [New York University], Columbia University, and Cornell. However, I didn't want to go to law school in New York City and was delighted when I was accepted at Cornell. So off I went to Cornell, knowing that the State of New York would pay for my tuition there.

Q: You were at Cornell from 1963 until...

TRUITT: 1966.

Q: What was the spirit at the Cornell Law School at that time?

TRUITT: First, the law school is very small. Our class began with about 150 students. The incoming classes, of course, are the largest, so there were only slightly more than about 150 students in the whole law school. It was a small group of people. At that time, there were five women in my class. The class ahead of us had two women and there were three in the class ahead of them. So we doubled the number of women at the Cornell Law School by bringing in five female students. We started with 150 students and graduated as a class of 112 students.

Cornell Law School was very much a male society, and a white male society at that. It was located in what I think is the most beautiful university complex. It was built by the president of the U.S. Steel Corporation and his wife. It was just an exquisite place to go to school. It was on the edge of the rest of the campus. Cornell is riddled with gorgeous facilities. We sat right on the level. It was a marvelous institution, in that the professors were very talented. At least outwardly, they were people without prejudices.

My classmates were a bit more touchy on various matters. Remember, this was during the height of the Vietnam War. A couple of my classmates came to me and said: "You shouldn't be here." They both said the same thing. I said: "Why?" They said: "You have taken the place of a man who is now being drafted and must go and fight in Vietnam. Your father must have better things on which to spend his money." I said: "Well, let me tell you. First, I'm a scholarship student from the state of New York. Secondly, I work for the university, which pays all of my room, board, and stipend charges. My father doesn't pay for me to attend this law school. Can your father say the same thing?"

It was absolutely stunning to me to have these colleagues of mine, these fellow students, come to me and say that they were outraged that we women were there at Cornell because someone had to go and fight in Vietnam. In fact, the reason that we had so many students leave law school was that a lot of men went to law school because then they could get a deferment from military service and would not have to go into the military. They knew that and they hated being placed in such a position. For example, we had 25 people who had entered first year law school. They said that law school was awful. They hated it and said that they would rather go into the military.

Q: Well, outside of the fact that these students wanted to avoid military service, was there a sense that they wanted to become lawyers and go out and defend the poor or become involved in causes, and this was a way to become engaged in it? Or did they feel that this was a very good way to make a lot of money?

TRUITT: Law school was very conservative. Probably most of the students attending it thought that the practice of the law was a damned good way to make a lot of money. This really came out because we had a wonderful speakers' program. One of our speakers, in fact, was Edward Bennett Williams. He was well known then for his defense of very high-profile people. He came to Cornell Law School to speak on the value of providing legal services to the indigent and to those who could not otherwise afford it. He said that that should be a requirement for anyone who became a lawyer.

As I watched my classmates and others in the audience, I thought that this was a hard sell. The people who sat there listening to Williams were totally unconvinced. That wasn't why they had gone to law school, and they really weren't interested in his views. In fact, very few of them were interested in government service. Very few of my classmates went into government service. They felt that they were in law school because they wanted to be lawyers. They saw the practice of law as a way to make a lot of money and to get into a profession which may be maligned a lot in the press, but they would say that this was more out of jealousy than anything else. They felt that what they wanted to do was to make money.

Q: So, in a way, what was known as the "phenomenon of the generation of the 1960's," was really a spotty thing, varying from place to place. This phenomenon might be observable at the University of California at Berkeley, at Columbia University, and a few other places, but it wasn't as deep-rooted within a generation as one might think.

TRUITT: This phenomenon was very active at Cornell University, but not at the law school or in most of the graduate schools. Most of the political activity was among the undergraduates. There was a lot of that kind of activity while I was at Cornell. There were a lot of pickets and strikes, sit-ins, and sit-outs. That was certainly going on, but it was primarily among the undergraduates on campus who were, in fact, politically energized by a lot of these issues, including racial integration and opposition to the Vietnam War.

I was there, on campus, when President Kennedy was assassinated. I remember, to this day, how I found out about the assassination. It cast a pall on the university community. That happened during my first year at Cornell. Then things became so very different during the next two years, in terms of the political activism which came out at that time.

Q: I'm stretching my memory somewhat, but I have a recollection of some black students coming out of a dormitory or something like that, carrying rifles. This kind of activity seemed to be lauded by the press. They seemed to be Black Panthers or something like that.

TRUITT: That happened after I left Cornell.

Q: That is etched in my mind in terms of Cornell.

TRUITT: That is correct, and it happened sometime between 1966 and 1969, after I left Cornell.

Q: How about you yourself? I assume that you were still reading the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. Were you sort of itching to get out and do something, or what was getting to you?

TRUITT: I just wanted to go out and find a job that I thought would be interesting. What I really wanted to do was to come and live here in Washington, DC. I was interested in watching the political process and seeing how it worked. I was interested in working for the U.S. Government because I was interested in government. Furthermore, to be perfectly frank, I knew how much easier it was going to be for me to get a job as a lawyer in government than it was going to be in a private law firm.

I wanted to move south. I had grown up in New York and had lived in Baltimore. I came to Washington because I thought that it was going to be interesting to be where government happened, even if I wasn't going to be a part of the political process, per se.

Q: Did you feel at all moved because it would be a little bit more difficult to work in a law firm as a woman than to work in government? Was that part of your calculation, or not?

TRUITT: I got the nicest offer in a law firm in New York state, which involved working for a firm of three lawyers. It was where I grew up. People were incredibly well off, and I'm sure that I would have been, as well, had I worked there. It just wasn't what I wanted to do.

What I wanted to do was to move here, to Washington, DC. Working in a U.S. Government agency would be just fine, because I wasn't driven by the desire to make a lot of money.

Q: When you were at Goucher College in Baltimore, did you slip over to Washington and sample the wares of Washington politics and the work here?

TRUITT: We came here for different reasons. I remember coming to Washington to go to a concert given by Joan Baez and Pete Seeger who, of course, were very politically active at the time. I came to Washington as much to see them as I did to hear them sing.

I also had what I thought was a marvelously fine professor of politics who brought us to Washington almost every other week for a whole term. One morning we came to Washington and met with people from the American Medical Association and heard their view of life. Then we went to the headquarters of the AFL/CIO [American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations]. On another occasion we met with people up on the Hill [in Congress]. On another day we met with representatives of the armed forces. So we came to Washington often, when you think about it, just to get a good feel for what was happening in government.

Q: Did international affairs, diplomacy, or the State Department cross your radar screen at all?

TRUITT: No, not at all. [Laughter] I got into the State Department because, after I graduated from law school, I worked and got married. I lived on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, near Ocean City. My husband had the opportunity to return and get a master's degree in tax law at Georgetown University.

So we all came to Washington, and I began looking for a job. In fact, I didn't care what job I got as long as I got a job. My first job offer was as a lawyer, working for the Passport Office of the State Department. I began working there in April 1971. I didn't know much about the State Department and knew even less about the Passport Office. But I knew that I'd be getting a paycheck. And that's how I arrived in the State Department.

Q: Now, you'd graduated from law school at Cornell University in 1966.

TRUITT: Right.

Q: Did you get married right away?

TRUITT: No, I worked for a year and a half here in Washington for the Department of Agriculture, in the General Counsel's Office. I then taught economics, which was my major subject at Goucher, as well as American history at a local, community college. Then I was married in October 1968.

Q: At the Department of Agriculture, what was your legal work like?

TRUITT: I found that it was very staid. I worked in the General Counsel's Office, which dealt with all kinds of marketing issues, including the marketing of milk, nuts, fruit, or other products and how the law applied to those different, marketing problems. The office where I worked was one of two divisions in the Department of Agriculture which actually engaged in litigation and also had a decision-making function.

In my division I was the youngest lawyer by 20 years.

Q: Good heavens!

TRUITT: There were 15 people in the division. I was like a Tiny Tot on parade. They would say: "Look here! Look at her!" However, on the other hand and after I had been there for two weeks the attitude was that this was real work we were involved in, and let's get it done. So they were very good about just pushing me into the process. However, as far as being on the cutting edge of what was going on at the time in the newspapers, the Department of Agriculture was not directly involved. The work was fun, I learned a lot, and to me it didn't matter what I did initially. There was so much to do.

Q: What about teaching at Goucher College? You had been away from it for a while. Was it a different Goucher when you came back?

TRUITT: You may have misunderstood me. I taught at Sullivan County Community College in New York state. A vacancy on their staff suddenly came up. For me, teaching was something which I found very easy. However, I am not sure that they would have hired me, had they not had this immediate opening, left by a person who left the faculty after one semester. However, I did well enough that they asked me to come back and teach on a permanent basis.

The students were kids from 18 to 20 years old. They were back home people. It was fun, probably one of the most fun things that I have ever done.

Q: Did you go back to Goucher College, too? Did you say that you taught there, too?

TRUITT: No. I only taught at Sullivan County Community College. I never returned to Goucher to teach.

Q: When you were married, was this still a time when you felt that you could continue your career, or...?

TRUITT: Oh, no. The Eastern Shore of Maryland was like going back in time. It was very conservative. Women did not hold paying jobs, unless they taught in elementary or high schools. I married a man whose family was very well known down there. None of the women in that family held paying jobs, but he had no biases in that direction. In fact, what happened is that I went to work part time for one of the lawyers in the town there. I did all of his real estate title work. He was the county treasurer, so my job was to check the titles on all of the properties belonging to people who hadn't paid their taxes. So I worked part time, but I had a skill which he needed. Other than that, no one would even have thought that I wanted to work.

Q: Sometimes I think of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, particularly until recently, as a place where the Fourteenth Amendment had not been promulgated. Some of the most violent fights went on, involving people like Stokely Carmichael, I think.

TRUITT: In Cambridge, MD.

Q: Cambridge, MD. Did this happen during the time you were there?

TRUITT: It did, but I was far enough removed from it that it did not really involve me. We were only about 16 miles away from Cambridge, but it might have been another world. It probably was a bit more modern because of where Ocean City, MD, is. There was a lot of activity going on at the time to build up a section called Ocean Pines, MD. A lot of money was being invested there. A lot of wealthy people were retiring down there.

Still, the community was very, very conservative. In fact, the only way that they could properly integrate the schools was to build three new schools. They closed the separate black and white schools and built all new schools which all of the schoolchildren had to attend. That was how Oyster County, Maryland, was racially integrated.

Q: Michelle, why don't we stop at this point? I'll put at the end of the tape here that we'll pick this up next time on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. You were now married. We'll talk about what happened and how you came back to Washington.

***

Today is October 15, 1997. Michelle, what happened next? You were doing some work for a law office there on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. You were a housewife and so forth. This area was sort of a patriarchal society par excellence.

TRUITT: My husband decided that he would get a master's degree in tax law. There were only two universities which offered such a program. One of them was Harvard University, and the other one was Georgetown University. We chose Georgetown and came to Washington. He went into school, and I began immediately to look for a job.

I applied at a lot of different places. It was a very interesting time. It was the fall of 1970. I remember reading an article in the Wall Street Journal that said that too many lawyers had been graduated. It was very difficult to find work. I, of course, was just delighted to read that. However, as I went from place to place, I interviewed with a variety of firms. Two of these places said that they already had a woman lawyer. These were all federal government agencies. There was nothing wrong with their telling me that. One of the places where I went to be interviewed had a woman in charge of the office and should have hired another woman. That was another eye opener at the time.

After a while, I got pretty good at handling these interviews. One day I had a wonderful interview. I finally said to the gentleman interviewing me: "Have you ever hired a woman?" He said: "No, but you'll be my first try." But I did not get the job. However, in January 1971, I had an interview with the Legal Division of the Passport Office of the State Department. I had no income but just wanted to get a job. The man who interviewed me was William Douglass. He said to me: "We're new. If the security processing goes through, you'll be on the job in three months. Consider this a 'done' deal, as long as you get through the security clearance." I think of that a lot now, because I did get the job within three months. I began working for the Department of State on April 12, 1971. I remember that because it was my mother-in-law's birthday.

So I went to work at the State Department. My parents sort of giggled about it and said that that job would last at least for a little while. My husband and I kind of giggled about it, too, because we didn't think that we would stay in the Washington area for more than a couple of years. I went to work for the Department, not because I wanted to work there but because it was the first job that I was offered. It was essential for one of us to be at work.

Q: Can you describe the Passport Office as you saw it, as a new employee? When you first arrive somewhere to take a job, you are particularly aware of the ambiance, and all of that. At least your awareness is much sharper than later on, when you get used to it.

TRUITT: The whole Passport Office at the time was housed on the third and fourth floor of what is now the New Executive Office Building. I gather that the office had been moved out of the main State Department building some time in the 1960s. This suited the Department, as well as Frances Knight [Director of the Passport Office at the time]. She said that was fine, and there we were in the New Executive Office Building, which I think is one of the most splendid locations that we ever had.

Q: Where is that located?

TRUITT: It is right off Lafayette Park, diagonally across from the White House, at 17th and Pennsylvania Avenues, NW (northwest Washington, DC). In fact, most of the space in the building was occupied by OMB [Office of Management and Budget] people. However, we were there with people who worked for the Selective Service Commission, or whatever it was called at the time.

This building accommodated a variety of functions, although the OMB was the principal occupant. As time went on, it became clear that OMB wanted the whole building. In fact, I was there for all of six months. It was interesting to be there because I was so much younger than everyone else doing work similar to mine. The person closest to me in age was William Wharton. Bill was the second son of Ambassador Wharton.

Q: Ambassador Wharton was a very distinguished person.

TRUITT: The younger Wharton was 10 years older than I. The other people in the office were 20 years older than I. The two of us were considered the Tiny Tots of the Passport Office. We were definitely junior. Everyone else was much more senior than we were. For me, of course, it was much more important as an experience.

I didn't have a clue about nationality law. I didn't know what the Bureau of Consular Affairs [of which the Passport Office was a part] did. I myself had never had a passport. However, I had a job.

Q: Did you get the feeling, as I did, that the Passport Office was a kind of closed corporation? It was a family with a matriarch as its chief. Did you pick up that feeling or not?

TRUITT: I picked up that feeling, but not right away. As soon as I came to work in the Passport Office, I was assigned a couple of legal issues that someone was glad to have done. I think that when you first enter any job like that, you're busy learning the job and getting to know the people with whom you are immediately working. You don't snap into the politics of the organization right away.

The politics of the organization became very clear to me about two years later, but not right away.

Q: Let's talk about your early times in the Passport Office. What kind of things were you working on?

TRUITT: The first issue that I got into involved in, at the time, was the Vietnam War and people who tried to evade the draft.

Q: Oh, yes, because we're talking about 1971. We were just pulling out of Vietnam, but the residue of the Vietnam War was very much with us.

TRUITT: We had a lot of people who were the subjects of federal felony arrest warrants. Some of them had gone AWOL [Absent Without Official Leave] or had left the United States to avoid the draft.

When people would come in and apply for passports, I spent a lot of my time interviewing them. We might deny them, or talk to members of their families. We were also revoking U.S. passports and preparing the documentation related thereto, because many of the cases were handled by consular officers at our individual consular posts. Part of my job was to ensure that the consular officer had all of the appropriate documentation and understood the issues well enough to deal with the parents of the persons involved. This was often complicated by the biases of the consular officers themselves. Some of them had no biases, as far as I was concerned. Some of them were strongly biased, influenced by the view that the persons they dealt with had evaded the draft or deserted the military. They wanted to be really gung ho.

Then we had a group of consular officers who did not agree with this regulation, did not want to hold the required hearings, or tell the people that their passports had been revoked or denied. All of those cases took quite a bit of time, and the packages were very large. At the time we had electric typewriters, but we did not have the sophisticated information technology equipment that we have now. Preparing one set of papers could take a secretary half a day to complete.

Q: Well, let's take a typical case. A young man appears at one of our consulates in Canada. How would you know the outlook of the consular officer?

TRUITT: Everyone who applied for a passport overseas did so through a consulate or embassy. Take, for instance, the consulate general in Toronto. An American citizen would apply for a passport. There was a very elaborate name check system, called the Lookout System, in effect at the time. A full information package would be assembled on the applicant, reflecting the information in the Lookout file. If the information was adverse, the passport application might be refused, and the individual might want a hearing on it. The matter would then be referred to the Department. Then I might send a cable to the consulate general in Toronto, saying: "Passport application is denied. The person is wanted for this or that reason. The person is entitled to a hearing. Does he want a hearing?"

Well, the person had come into the consulate general in Toronto. After filling in an application, the consular officer would check the Lookout List, and then might inform the citizen that his application for a passport had been denied but that he was entitled to a hearing. That might be the end of it, and he would say, "Goodbye." Others might want a hearing. The consular officer would advise us.

Q: How would you find out whether the consular officer was being too tough or too easy? Then tell us about the hearing.

TRUITT: You could tell very quickly because of the correspondence you had had with the consular officer. In other words, where the consular officer was coming from, politically. Do you remember the old Operations Memorandum [OM]? This was the means by which we conducted much of our business, if the matter were not really urgent. We communicated by cable and also by Operations Memorandum. Each consular officer basically drafted his own OM. You could tell whether he needed to hold a hearing. If the individual hadn't done a lot wrong, why couldn't he obtain a passport? The consular officer had to make clear to the applicant why the application was denied. A lot of consular officers would inform the Department: "I've told the applicant that he basically doesn't have a chance," so he was not going to hold a formal hearing. The consular officer might feel that a hearing would simply waste time. Then we would knew where that consular officer was coming from. You could tell fairly easily.

We did have some embassies and consulates at which a relatively high number of passport applications were refused, on a regular basis, primarily in English-speaking countries. You knew something about a consular officer after he had served there for two or three years.

Q: Basically, Canada and Sweden were the two countries where draft dodgers and military deserters went. Could you explain basically how a hearing would be held after a passport was refused? What issues would you be looking at?

TRUITT: The hearing would be held in one of the offices in the consulate or consulate general. The issues for us in the Passport Office were very cut-and-dried. The applicant would be identified by his name and date and place of birth, which are the identifiers for our passport applicants, even today. Those are the critical elements. We would ensure that the person who was before us was indeed the person described. We would also have a copy of the Federal Arrest Warrant or Department of Defense Warrant of Arrest. We would conclude that this was, in fact, the same person. This was, in fact, a copy of the arrest warrant. We would then have proven our case. It was that simple for us. This was the person described, and this was, in fact, the warrant which showed that he was wanted on a criminal charge. Here was the sub-part of the Code of Federal Regulations, which states that we may deny the person a passport if he is the subject of a federal felony warrant or a Department of Defense arrest warrant. That would be the end of our case.

Normally, the passport applicant might wish to argue the merits of the case. He might even wish to argue the merits of the warrant. We would say that we were sorry but we were not the agency to consider the merits of the case. That would have to be discussed between the passport applicant and either the Department of Justice or the Department of Defense. Sometimes there would be very long statements made by passport applicants, but in fact in most cases this process never took more than half an hour to complete.

Q: You were saying that you could tell where a consular officer was coming from if he told the applicant that he didn't have a chance of getting a passport. In other words, "You don't have a chance. Don't bother." In fact, what chance would they have?

TRUITT: They really didn't have a chance, although occasionally the consular officer would have identified the wrong person. Sometimes, the person would say: "The Warrant of Arrest has been withdrawn, and I've got evidence of that." In that case, that would be fine, and we would take care of the matter and would put the case to rest.

Occasionally, there would be interesting disconnects. Somebody might come in and say: "In fact, I have abandoned my U.S. citizenship. I have taken steps to ensure that I am no longer a U.S. citizen, and I would like the Warrant of Arrest abandoned." We would say: "No, it is not a matter of whether you are a citizen or not," and we would get into some other issues because the situation wasn't always entirely clear to the applicant. Giving up U.S. citizenship in no way resolved a warrant of arrest.

Q: So at that point in time somebody who had gone to Canada or Sweden, to mention two of the major places where these Americans would go after leaving the U.S., just couldn't come back to the United States.

TRUITT: They could come back, and we would, in fact, issue them with a document for direct return to the United States, so that they could deal with the Warrant of Arrest. It was never like the issue raised in the work of fiction, the short story about, was it Phillip Nolan...?

Q: You mean the character in the short story, The Man Without a Country. Edward Everett Hale wrote the book.

TRUITT: Everyone who is a U.S. citizen has the right to return to this country, but that does not mean that he or she must return on a United States passport. We can issue a travel document which will allow the person to enter the country. In fact, we always offered that to people who had the right to return, but not on a U.S. passport.

Q: How did you find the Department of Justice and the U.S. military, as far as the documents they produced were concerned? Did you find that they handled them well, were somewhat sloppy, or what? An awful lot of these documents were issued.

TRUITT: The documents they gave us generally were just fine. I just thought that we never had a systematic approach. I never knew why we got certain people and why we didn't get others. All of us knew in the Passport Office that we wouldn't get them all. However, the cases that came to our attention were well documented.

Q: You were mentioning the case of a young man in Canada who came into the United States, did whatever he wanted to do, and then was, perhaps, picked up for draft evasion, or whatever. Did that kind of thing happen when you were in the Passport Office?

TRUITT: We were never involved in such issues. The cases we handled involved applications for U.S. passports, either here in the United States or outside the country. Other than that, matters like the one you just mentioned were clearly not our concern. We only had that one, simple issue. If we did find out about someone who was the subject of a warrant of arrest, we would notify the government entity which originally had advised us. We would state that such and such a person lived at a given address, and so forth. We did not involve ourselves in law enforcement activity as such.

Q: So consular officers overseas were not running around, trying to chase down people. Their involvement was more a passive matter.

TRUITT: That is correct. I don't remember any case of a consular officer contacting the Department in an effort to chase down people. I went to a party where I ran into John Smith, who advised me that he had evaded the draft. He said that these are the facts involving him. He asked me what he should do.

We used to get matters of that kind involving citizenship cases. However, I never saw a case involving draft evasion.

Q: Did you get any directives from Frances Knight [Director of the Passport Office] involving these matters, or were you too far down the line to be involved?

TRUITT: I really did not know much about Frances Knight. I was once given the responsibility for coordinating a piece of litigation in which she had a personal interest. That piece of litigation involved the oath of allegiance on the passport application form.

When I arrived in the Passport Office in 1971, before you signed your name to a passport application, there was an oath which said: "I swear (or affirm) allegiance to the United States," because some people were unwilling to "swear" to anything for religious reasons. They would just "affirm" to the truth of their statements. We had a group of people who took that issue to court. At the time, in connection with any passport litigation, we had to be aware of the limits to our authority. There was also the Legal Adviser in the Department of State, who would send the case to us. We would then prepare all of the documents on the matter and return them to the Legal Adviser's office.

Frances Knight was politically sensitive to the act of allegiance issue. In fact, she had a strong, personal bias on the act of allegiance. I remember reading a letter from her to a Member of Congress. She wrote: "I am not writing this to you as the head of the Passport Office. I'm writing this as a citizen of our country. I believe that the act of allegiance is a critical element for people who wish to travel."

Years later, when I was clearing out my files, I found the office copy of that letter, drafted by one of my colleagues. No one had ever told him that it was sent out. That was long after Frances Knight had retired and that officer had retired as well.

That was when I first got to know something about Frances Knight. I began to study her management style within the Passport Office, as well as in the rest of the Department of State. This was, indeed, a very interesting process to watch, because her management style was unique.

Q: Before we move on to how Frances Knight operated, were you doing any other type of things during the first couple of years you were in the Department of State?

TRUITT: When I interviewed for a job with Bill Douglass, he described to me work that would basically involve dealing with the integrity of documents and initiatives taken to prevent the fraudulent use and possession of U.S. passports.

As it turned out, when I came to work, there was a sudden vacancy and that is where they put me. However, after a year, I went to Bill Douglass and said: "You may remember what we discussed about my duties. I'll keep up with this if I have to, but I'd really like to get into the other part of what you described would be part of my job." As he had described the job, it had been right at the time when Timothy Leary had obtained a fraudulent U.S. passport.

Q: Could you explain who Timothy Leary was?

TRUITT: Timothy Leary was, indeed, a cult figure and a man associated with the drug culture. He advocated the use of LSD [a synthetic hallucinatory drug]. He advocated that it should be made a legal substance in the United States. There were a lot of people who agreed with him. However, he was caught up in the web of the law and was the subject of an outstanding federal felony warrant of arrest. It was embarrassing to the Department of State, and the Passport Office in particular, when it was found that, in fact, Timothy Leary had obtained a U.S. passport by using the birth certificate of a baby who had died. This is now called an "infant death identity." He also obtained a fishing license issued to him in that infant death identity name.

Those were the only pieces of evidence that he produced when he walked into a passport agency. I believe that it was the passport agency in Chicago. I could be mistaken because it is now a long time ago. Fraudulent passports are usually based on the birth certificate of someone who died and very inadequate identity evidence. You can obtain a fishing license by going and paying the $5 fee. He did. It was a brand new fishing license. Learning about the infant death identity would have been much more difficult at the time. This case was sure a wake up call for people in the Department. For my boss, this involved a big step forward in drawing people's attention to the fact that no one commits passport fraud just to pay money to the U.S. Government. People commit passport fraud with some kind of criminal intent in mind.

To a large extent, passport fraud involves people who are not U.S. citizens but who want evidence of U.S. citizenship to leave this country. However, there was also a significant proportion of people who were drug dealers, drug runners, people involved in white collar crime, or people who in fact were wanted by the Department of Justice and were just assuming another name.

So this was the beginning of a massive, intensive review of how we issue passports to U.S. citizens. The U.S. Government invested a lot of interest and effort in that area. I thought that it was a fascinating part of what was going on in the Passport Office. I began to work in that area and did so almost exclusively until I became a supervisor of this effort. I did that for about two years.

Q: In this connection, was there a problem with the fact that a U.S. passport was equivalent to a national identity card? Did the Passport Office advocate a better identity system?

TRUITT: The case had not yet really been made for setting up a national identity card system. Frances Knight certainly thought that a national identity card system would be appropriate. Furthermore, she thought that she would be the appropriate person to be put in charge of that initiative. She was politically very conservative and had very strong political ties up on the Hill to people like Congressman Wayne Hays, who was an even more conservative person, if anything. However, I would say that, overall, no one in the Department of State supported Frances Knight on this subject at that time.

Keep in mind that then, and probably even now, no more than 10 percent of the people in this country have U.S. passports. This is because most Americans never travel outside this country, even though the overall number of travelers continues to grow. Those who hold U.S. passports are really a more narrowly defined group. When I went to work for the Department of State, you could get a U.S. passport with either a certified copy of your birth certificate or a certified copy of your baptismal certificate.

The fraud in baptismal certificates was extensive, especially in the non-U.S. citizen community. Within a couple of years a copy of a baptismal certificate was no longer acceptable as proof of U.S. citizenship. Only a certified copy of a birth certificate was acceptable. We tried to work very closely, not only with the passport agencies, but with our acceptance people, including clerks of court and post office clerks, to explain that passport issuance was a two-part process.

First, you have to establish that a person has a claim to U.S. citizenship. Then you have to establish the identity of the person who is, in fact, using that claim to citizenship. A birth certificate indicates that a given person may be a U.S. citizen. However, then you need an identity document. The identity document of choice is primarily a driver's license. All drivers' licenses are issued by the states, the District of Columbia, and the territories, with each state having its own set of criteria. So we tried to make sure that when a U.S. passport was issued, we were comfortable with the fact that it was being provided to somebody who was a citizen and that his or her correct identity had been established.

Q: Regarding a certified copy of a birth certificate, outside the fact that you are male or female, and perhaps of African-American or Chinese ancestry, anybody could walk in at any time and get a birth certificate that matched the gender and racial origins of a given person. It might be easy to obtain copies of fraudulent documents.

TRUITT: Well, whole books and pamphlets have been written on how you can, in fact, create a fraudulent identity. I used to collect copies of these publications in my office. If you understand all of the pieces involved, you can put together a pretty good identity. The problem is to put this identity together and then to let it rest for a while. That is, don't try to use it immediately to get a passport.

We would train our people to notice that the birth certificate presented with a passport application was okay, but the driver's license was two days old. Was this person, say, 35 and had never driven a car before? That is something that might make you ask for a little bit more documentation. You might want to know a little bit more. It sounds as if this is a problem. The interviewers would also go through a lot of other identifiers so that, by the time we had all of that documentation and the information on the passport application form, we would decide whether or not we thought that we had somebody who was okay.

We used to train acceptance clerks who lived in metropolitan areas. No one lives in a post office box. For the most part people live in houses or in apartments on streets. If somebody says that their permanent address is a post office box, this should raise a question in your mind. Often I would tease such people and say that I come from a small town in upstate New York. I would say that we had 150 permanent residents in the whole town. We all lived in post office boxes, so you'd have to know where you are. However, in fact we found that we could take five or six key items from a passport application and would say to the office trainee: "If they all don't hang together, you have a problem case." We could do that.

Q: The postal service can be a good source of information in some small places.

TRUITT: Most post offices which accept passport applications are somewhat larger post offices in larger, metropolitan areas. The system I originally encountered in 1971 was based on State Department passport agencies and then primarily state, a few federal, and then a lot of county clerks who accepted passport applications. The number of passport applications grew so quickly that the clerks of district and federal courts were swamped. We invited the U.S. Postal Service to take part in the application process, especially in the larger, metropolitan areas, so the clerks of court would not quietly go under because of the number of passport applications.

Over time, the whole issue of the patronage system of appointments of postmasters in the Postal Service really disappeared, to a large extent. I grew up in an area where virtually every postmaster had been appointed on the basis of patronage. I only knew one of these postmasters who was anything but honest, and you could trust them. They were good people to have because they would say: "I never saw this person (that is, the person who was applying for a passport) in my life. I don't know why he says that he lives here." It's great to have such information. It was wonderful to have such a source of information. We never had any particular problems with people in the Postal Service.

Q: While you were working in the Passport Office, did you have cooperation from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] and other such agencies on trends, how to do things, and things of that nature?

TRUITT: We had cooperation from the FBI. There was a series of fraudulent passport applications. There was a student activist group called the SDS.

Q: These initials stood for Students for a Democratic Society.

TRUITT: That's right. Members of the SDS committed a series of passport frauds. They were initially considered a domestic subversive, terrorist organization. The FBI investigated them. In fact, many of the SDS members had used infant death identities to establish new identities. By its choice, the FBI became the investigative agency which had first crack at investigating all infant death identity cases at that time in the 1970s. This later created some tension between the FBI and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in the State Department. However, the FBI was involved in such matters because of the terrorist activities which it was investigating. Otherwise, the FBI was not particularly interested in passport fraud, because its work was primarily in other areas.

However, we worked with the FBI in connection with some suspected passport fraud cases. We spent a lot of time with FBI agents, explaining what we did and what we were looking for. They did not provide us with training. In fact, we developed our own training course. Bill Duggan, Bill Wharton, and I were the three people who went out to every State Department passport agency and were in touch with many post offices. I traveled throughout the whole country for three years in connection with this matter, training our own people in how to identify fraudulent passport applications. We set up a program which is still in place, under which every passport agency had a designated person who was responsible for all of the fraudulent applications received by that passport agency.

Q: Did you find that the trend of fraudulent applications tended to rise? Was there a steady incidence of such applications? Where was the fraud? Was it still a matter of student dissidents, military deserters, and other people?

TRUITT: The largest percentage of fraudulent passport applications always came from illegal aliens whom we could identify. The hardest cases involved people who may have believed that they were U.S. citizens but in fact were not. We didn't know why they had committed fraud. Often, we never found out why, because for years there was no systematic, investigative mechanism. We now have the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in the State Department which has criminal investigators and offices around the country. However, from our perspective, they tended to concentrate on cases which, they thought, would really hit the front pages. They thought that they would get a lot of splash, or attention, for investigating such matters.

We would send them case after case, month after month. Sometimes, a year later, we would ask them: "Did you ever receive this request?" They would often say: "Well, yes, we got it but we didn't have time to handle this. We can't see that there is anything very important in this case. How do you know and why do you think that this is important?" So it was often very difficult. People in the Passport Office would say: "Let's have our own, investigative arm." Other people said: "Let's refer everything to the FBI" to do something. The State Department Office of Diplomatic Security was appalled, because so much of their budget was predicated on handling passport fraud cases which they never took action on. So there was a lot of coming and going on these matters.

Over time, this situation improved as what is now called the Bureau of Diplomatic Security began to sort out all of these law enforcement matters. An officer from Diplomatic Security told me one day: "There is nothing in the law which says that we have to do anything on these matters. We are not 'required' to investigate these cases." Another person who was participating in this conversation said that he was heartsick. He had spent his whole career trying to develop the passport fraud portfolio, and here was this security officer saying: "Well, we'll handle these cases if we like it."

So it was a difficult time in that regard for all of those cases in which we believed that U.S. citizens were involved. Every once in a while we would get involved in a really good case. We had a whole group of people called the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, or some such name. It was a wonderful name. They were all narcotics traffickers. We found about 150 fraudulent passport applications out of two chains of these people in California. That drew the attention of a lot of people, but then interest in this matter declined again. However, fraudulent passport applications primarily involved illegal aliens whom we could identify.

Q: I don't know whether you got involved in this, but as a consular officer overseas, for years I was told: "Oh, if you're in Italy, a stolen American passport is worth so many dollars, and if you're in a 'more difficult place,' it's worth twice that," or something like that. This was always the story. I never could quite figure this out and always took these stories with a large grain of salt. Did this kind of thing come under your jurisdiction?

TRUITT: The reason this kind of thing was said, and a lot of it was true, was that a U.S. passport, in fact, was the best travel document of its kind. It was very sophisticated and had a lot more integrity devices in it than passports issued by virtually any other country during the 1970s. If someone obtained a U.S. passport which had been lost or stolen and had it altered by a good alterer, you would find that an altered U.S. passport was very well and favorably used all over the world. The best alterers were in Colombia and the Philippines, but there were also good alterers elsewhere. We obtained one of these altered passports which had been used by one man for two years. He had traveled all over the world, and it had many entry and exit stamps in it.

U.S. passports were so well regarded by immigration inspectors around the world that they would look at a U.S. passport and almost automatically believe in their authenticity. Only occasionally would you find immigration inspectors who would say: "I just don't believe that this is an authentic U.S. passport." Then the person holding it might admit that, in fact, it was not his passport. That consideration made the price for a lost or stolen U.S. passport fairly high. Most altered passports were used for years for travel abroad. Most of the people using these altered passports would avoid using them for entry into the U.S. because they knew that our immigration inspectors had been thoroughly briefed on such passports. So that was the reason why lost or stolen U.S. passports were worth a lot of money.

Q: You were doing this and training people for about four years.

TRUITT: As I came into an office which had a lot of summer employees, people began retiring. In fact, Bill Duggan became the Deputy Director of the Passport Office. Bill Wharton became the Chief of the whole Legal Division, where about 50 people worked. I became the Deputy Chief of the Legal Division.

We became involved in a lot of other issues, including freedom of information and the Privacy Act. We spent a lot of our time developing regulations on the release of passport information, because we were not the centralized file for the Department of State. All freedom of information and privacy requests for access to passport records came directly to, and still do, to the Passport Office. We set up the criteria on how those requests would be processed.

So I became a manager of people, although I still had some very interesting citizenship litigation at the time. Bill Wharton and I also managed those programs. Then, with the retirement of Frances Knight [as Director of the Passport Office] in 1977, we saw our first Foreign Service Officer appointed to be Director of the Passport Office. His deputy was also a Foreign Service Officer. Loren Lawrence became the first Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Passport Services. His deputy director was Robert Lamb, who had previously been an administrative officer. In fact, we began to change directions, and there was a massive reorganization of the whole Bureau of Consular Affairs.

I moved out of legal work, spent almost a year working as a Special Assistant in the office of Barbara Watson [then the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs], helping the Bureau to put together the arrangements for implementation of the Treaty on the Exchange of Penal Sanctions and Freedoms. The first such agreement was between the U.S. and Turkey, and the next such agreement was between the U.S. and Mexico. Some U.S. citizens had been arrested, tried, and then incarcerated on a variety of charges. The treaty allowed us to bring those U.S. citizens back home for incarceration here. I helped work on that, once we had this new administration in the Passport Office.

Then there was a thorough reorganization. I no longer did legal work but became the Chief of the Office of Operations in the Passport Office.

Q: I'd like to go back to Frances Knight. She was a fascinating character in the government bureaucracy. I would like your impressions of what you observed of how Frances operated, both within the Passport Office in the Department of State and within the U.S. Government.

TRUITT: By the time she retired in 1977, Frances Knight had been the Director of the Passport Office for approximately 24 years, from 1953 to 1977. She succeeded the woman who had been the Director of the Passport Office for almost as long a time, Ruth Shipley. I don't know much about Ruth Shipley, other than the fact that she wrote only with a green pen.

Q: Even during the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt, people would ask him why Mrs. Shipley did this or that, and he would answer that he was not going to mess around with her.

TRUITT: That's right. Frances Knight had the same kind of aura around her for a long period of time in the Department of State. People felt that they weren't going to mess around with her. In fact, Frances Knight ruled the Passport Office with an iron hand. One of the first things that I remember hearing about her was when we, in the Passport Office, were going to have a bake sale down in the New Executive Office Building. We had been in the practice of making a large contribution to a charity at Christmas. "We" meant that Frances Knight made this contribution on behalf of the Passport Office. So I was asked what I was going to cook for the bake sale. I said that I didn't think that I would bake anything. I was told: "Frances Knight won't forgive you for that." However, I said that I wasn't going to cook for the bake sale. I said: "Who is this person, anyway?"

Well, at the senior level of the Passport Office were herself, the Deputy Director of the Passport Office, and four division chiefs. The divisions, at that time, consisted of the Domestic Operations Division, supervising the passport agencies; the Administrative Division, which dealt with traditional administrative and GSO [General Services Officer] kind of work, including hiring and firing personnel; the Legal Division; and the Foreign Operations Division, which dealt with all of our consular posts abroad on citizenship and related issues.

All of the division chiefs were GS-15s [senior Civil Service positions], deputy directors, or senior officers. Frances Knight was a senior officer. What I thought I saw at the time was a person who had the habit of pitting division chiefs against each other to see what would happen and to see who would prevail. The first time I saw this process, I thought that it was a mistake, as I did not understand her management style. I noticed that Robert Johnson, the Deputy Director of the Passport Office, deflected a lot of those pressures but also saw what could be done. In fact, that was her management style until she retired from the Department of State in 1977. She would pit one peer officer against another to find out what would happen and who would survive, who was politically with her, and who would do whatever she told him to do, whatever the considerations. To her, loyalty was everything. Conscience was not valued.

I thought that this was a pretty dismal system. In fact, I found that I was pregnant in the fall of 1975 and began to look forward to the time that I was going to have away from the job. At this point, Frances Knight was over 70. The law then provided that you were required to retire at age 70 if you were in the Civil Service, unless you were given an extension. Only the President could give you an extension. She was spending incredible amounts of time arranging for those extensions, just ignoring the business of the Passport Office. In this respect, she tried to prove that she was the only person capable of keeping this organization on track.

I found it difficult to work in this environment. I found her management style so rude and obtrusive that I was afraid that it was going to affect my pregnancy with my child. Of course, I hoped that some President would have enough courage to say "No" to her requests for an extension of her service. In fact, my baby was born in May 1976. Frances Knight's birthday was in July 1976, and President Gerald Ford turned down her request for an extension. He evidently said: "Oh, enough is enough."

The tension between Frances Knight and other officers in the Department was dreadful. Robert Hennemeyer was then the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, a man with a wonderful sense of humor who writes brilliantly. He was the person who used to draft the responses to the correspondence which Frances Knight received. Someone got hold of one of these responses, and we were just delighted with it, because he gave a suitable response to each one. However, in the meantime, we just had to go on suffering, because we had all of these giants [senior officers] fighting against each other.

Q: How did this process work out? If you had four division chiefs, all of whom were pitted against each other, that means that you were pitted against your opposite numbers in your area. Didn't that affect all of you, down below?

TRUITT: Yes, periodically it created some conflicts which I thought were totally unnecessary. People would say to each other: "That's my job!" Or: "That's not my job!" This would depend on what the issue was. Each of us had our own marching orders. There was little that you could do to deflect such conflicts. Basically, I worked for Bill Duggan, who said: "This is my problem. It is not your problem. All of you should give problems like this to me, and I will take care of them." Of all of the division chiefs, in my view he was a prince in that regard. He understood that his subordinates should not be the whipping boys for anybody else trying to deal with these matters. He would take them on himself. He was, in fact, very good at doing that.

Q: Did you have a form for handling these matters? You are a lawyer and you were dealing with the law. You had Frances Knight, a very arbitrary person at the top. Often there would be legal issues which would come up. I can see where Frances Knight would feel that we shouldn't issue a passport to so-and-so because he is too leftist or something like that, and you were dealing with the law. I would think that the legal people would find themselves clashing over such matters.

TRUITT: The clashes did not take place over legal issues. There were certain parameters for action, and there were certain things that she could not do. I think that the Department would have removed the oath of allegiance from passport applications, had it not been for Frances Knight. She forced the Department to litigate that issue. Having been forced to litigate this issue, which she lost, it weakened her hand.

On citizenship issues, she had a very conservative line. If you voted in a foreign election, if you ran for political office in a foreign country, if you became naturalized in a foreign country, she considered that this involved loss of U.S. citizenship. Little by little, every one of those issues was litigated, and we lost them all. By that time her political power base became narrower and narrower. The Department had to litigate these issues, because this was what was on the books. It was felt that we had to change our position, but we had to litigate these issues, and we lost. So a lot of those legal issues simply went away.

However, she would always find something to get people clashing with each other. Sometimes, I used to think, she did this for the pure interest of it.

Q: I know that as a consular officer during this period, I worked in a number of consular sections overseas. As a matter of fact, at one time I was talking to somebody in the Passport Office before I went out to a new post, and I was checking out various issues. They told me: "Oh, yes, you're on Frances Knight's 'good' list." I had no idea that she had a list of any kind, but apparently she did, including on it consular officers who had never crossed her or perhaps had never had any chance to do so.

When I came into the Foreign Service in 1955, the Immigration and Naturalization Act was extremely complicated and went into excruciating detail on when and where you were born and how you lost or gained citizenship. By the time we reached the point where Frances Knight was retiring from the Department of State, many aspects of immigration and naturalization law had been overturned. It became very difficult to lose U.S. nationality. This meant that, for a consular officer overseas, issuing passports became a very routine job. Previously, it had taken quite a bit of expertise. Again, it was no use contacting the Passport Office and asking questions. This function was no longer very high on our priority list.

TRUITT: The work of what was then the Foreign Operations Division in the Passport Office changed radically during my time in the office, as I think it did when you were a consular officer. The citizenship laws had previously been, I think, very insular. They were anti-married women. If a woman married a foreign national, she lost her citizenship. There were all kinds of quirks in the law which were, indeed, archaic, from my standpoint.

The basic Immigration and Naturalization Law of 1924 kept building and building, without anything being removed. The ways that you could lose and acquire U.S. nationality were very complex, and these were, in fact, affected by the passage of the law of 1956. I always thought that this was good, because of some of the other issues, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Foreign Operations Division in the Passport Office.

The Foreign Operations Division was combined with what had amounted to an emergency services area, called Special Consular Services in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. There is now much stronger direction to help American citizens abroad in everything from adopting a child to finding a competent lawyer or doctor providing proper medical service - in general, trying to ensure the well-being of U.S. citizens living abroad. If you look at what the Office of Special Consular Services did when it was first put together in the 1970s, which is where those resources are now, I believe that the regulations on the acquisition and loss of nationality had been cut by two-thirds. However, the resources available have expanded because the desires and expectations ofU.S. citizens have gone in different directions.

Q: It used to be said that Ruth Shipley, Frances Knight's predecessor as the Director of the Passport Service, didn't seem to understand why American citizens were born abroad anyway. This attitude colored much of what was going on. She felt that American citizenship was a privilege and she gave permission whether or not a child could be documented as an American citizen.

TRUITT: I suspect that that was true for quite a while after the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts were passed. I reviewed every passport file on which a request was outstanding under the Freedom of Information Act, but not the Privacy Act. The law had gotten to the point where, if somebody died, it was always a Freedom of Information or Privacy Act matter. I remember having to deal with the death of Howard Hughes abroad.

I got one case out of the late 1930s or early 1940s. People had always told me that Ruth Shipley had the final say-so on who was a citizen and who was not. What I had before me was the definitive case of somebody who was not a U.S. citizen. During World War II, it became a very critical matter for this person to travel on a U.S. passport. She arranged for a passport to be issued to him. I was absolutely stunned, because I had always been told that Mrs. Shipley, of all people, had never, ever made an exception regarding the issuance of a U.S. passport. Of all things, to learn this from a Freedom of Information case!

May I raise the case of Howard Hughes for a minute?

Q: Please do.

TRUITT: Howard Hughes died shortly after...

Q: You might explain who Howard Hughes was.

TRUITT: Howard Hughes was an incredibly wealthy multi-millionaire. He had made much of his money in aviation. However, by the time he died, he had become a virtual recluse. He had been very successful in the movie industry as well. He was so wealthy that many people said that he could do whatever he wanted. People believed that he had been allowed to travel for years without a U.S. passport.

Shortly after his death [in 1976], one of the news agencies came in with an FOI [Freedom of Information] request. What they asked for was the most recent passport photo submitted by Howard Hughes. I always supposed that they asked for this because they wanted to see a fairly current picture of him. So we checked his passport records, and the most recent picture we could find was obviously decades old. In fact, Howard Hughes probably traveled the world for years without benefit of a currently valid U.S. passport, and obviously no one cared.

So we had this passport photo, but it was obviously very old. Because this request had been presented by a news agency and not by a family member, we took the position that the photo was protected under the Privacy Act. This position was appealed by the news agency. I was just coming back to work after maternity leave, and I got to argue the case before the Internal Appellate Administrative Group, or whatever its name was, in the Department of State. I prevailed over the Office of the Legal Adviser of the Department. The decision was made not to release the photo of Howard Hughes.

Some people elsewhere in the Department were so beside themselves over this decision that they called for a rehearing. Later, one of the people who was involved in the request for a rehearing, came to me and said: "You know, they 'set you up' for the second hearing." I said: "Sure. It always was the Department's view that it wanted to release the Howard Hughes file." I said that I always knew that there was going to be a second hearing, that the chairman of this appellate board was going to rethink this issue, and that I was going to lose on the second time. I said: "But it sure was kind of 'fun' the first time, wasn't it?" [Laughter]

The rehearing was held before a packed house in one of the conference rooms on the ground floor of the Department of State. There must have been 150 people there just to hear how this case was going to turn out, because Howard Hughes, even then, was such a well-known figure, and this question had become such a hot agenda item. I often thought about this case later and said to myself: "What a fun day it was that I convinced this administrative chamber to turn down the application for access to Howard Hughes' file."

The Office of the Legal Adviser was furious about the original decision not to release the file. Two of its representatives just sat there after the original decision was made. They were just livid. I always thought that this was one of my more memorable moments. I had prevailed over the Office of the Legal Adviser for at least a week!

Q: Did you have any impression of what Frances Knight thought of J. Edgar Hoover [long-time Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations]? They were two cats of the same breed, as it were. They hung on in office for a long time.

TRUITT: I always called her Miss Knight. I never knew her well enough to call her Frances. However, outside the office we always called her Frances. Briefly, Frances understood power. She was very good at having a lot of her staff ingratiate themselves at the Under Secretary's level in the Department. She always had a good pipeline into Ben Read [Executive Secretary of the Department and later Under Secretary of State for Management], and I watched that relationship. That kept her in balance against the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. She also was in close touch with a couple of good, key staff persons in Congress.

This is how I get to Congressman Wayne Hays. Over time Wayne Hays became the only person in Congress who would say: "I know that this is 'right.'" This was because Frances Knight had talked to him about this issue, whatever it was, and they had agreed that it was right.

Q: Wayne Hays was a Democratic Congressman from Ohio and the Chairman, I think, of the House Ways and Means Committee. He was an extremely powerful man.

TRUITT: He was very powerful until the news broke that he paid Elizabeth Ray $14,000 a year as a member of his staff.

Q: She was unable to type and only came into the office for a couple of hours once or twice a week.

TRUITT: She had a private office while the rest of his staff was in tight cubicles. This made a big splash in the newspapers, basically ending his political career. With his defeat and disappearance from Congress, I don't think that Frances Knight knew anyone of great power left in Congress. This also tied into the time when Jimmy Carter was President. I remember that Frances Knight went personally to the White House to take his diplomatic passport application. In my view, she also took her personal request that President Carter extend her again in office so that she could continue to work in the Civil Service beyond age 70 and could remain as Director of the Passport Office.

In fact, President Carter wrote her and said how much everyone appreciated her services. However, he said that he would not extend her on in office. There was legislation pending in Congress abolishing a mandatory retirement age for members of the Civil Service [later known as the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978]. She would have been a beneficiary of that legislation. I can remember being told that people I knew very well in the Department went up to Congress and asked key Congressional staffers to hold up passage of this legislation until after Frances Knight retired. Otherwise, she would never have retired. This legislation would then be known as The Frances Knight Memorial Act or The Frances Knight Savings Act. In fact, she retired from the Civil Service, and that legislation later passed Congress. However, she could no longer claim to be covered by it.

Q: Did you have any feeling about the relationship J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigations, had with the Passport Office? He was very much the same kind of person as Frances Knight.

TRUITT: There was talk of it, and I knew that there was some substance to this story. During the whole time that I worked in the fraud area in the Passport Office, there were FBI agents in the office with us every afternoon, reviewing passport records. They basically had carte blanche to review records of anyone and everyone. There were at least two FBI agents working in our office on a full-time basis. Sometimes, there were more. Any passport application that they asked to see was immediately shown to them.

The FBI was the only U.S. Government agency that used our files on a daily basis. Virtually every federal agency could use our files by law. It wasn't as if there were anything illegal about it. Obviously, there had been some good understanding in the past that we were a source of such information. We would facilitate the use of the information. In fact, one full-time employee in our division had the job of coordinating action to obtain those passport files and turning them over to these FBI agents. But other than a lot of chit-chat about how the two of them [Frances Knight and J. Edgar Hoover] were very conservative, politically, and had a lot in common, I never saw anything further in it. However, this was in part because of where I was.

Q: We're about to end this segment. I would like to cover one more point on Frances Knight. Would that be all right with you?

TRUITT: Yes.

Q: You have said that Frances Knight had the reputation of being very arbitrary, and so forth. There also was the fact that, as a U.S. Government official, she handled many matters. Passports were issued in a fairly timely manner. When there were emergencies, passports would come out quickly, particularly when Members of Congress asked for passports. In other words, things happened so she at least had the aura of being able to get things done. Can you talk about that?

TRUITT: I believe that more of this was done at that time than was fashionable. Frances Knight understood this, and she was very successful in that regard. When I arrived in the Passport Office, we had, and it still exists there, one small office which is in direct contact every day with Congressional offices and staffers. They say: "I have so and so. He wants to get a passport." We would say: "Send him over." We would take his application on the spot. We always had that facility available for them. We would help U.S. citizens resolve their problems, through the offices of their respective Congressmen or Senators.

Senator Jesse Helms [Republican, North Carolina] understands that principle of service very well. He was always a good user of that office in the Passport Office. On a given day there would be eight to 10 people who, in fact, were the direct liaison between Congressional offices and the Passport Office, arranging to have passports issued.

For the general public we had something else which no one else in the Department was doing or, if they were doing it, they weren't doing it well. We had a Duty Officer, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for emergency facilitation and issuance of passports. You can get a passport issued out of hours today, as well as you could back then, on a 24 hours a day basis.

I think that Frances Knight was responsible for that. We got a lot of credit for that, because it provided service to the U.S. public. It was a critical service, and people provided it well and willingly. She also made a practice of saying that a U.S. passport has to be the best citizenship identity document in the world. She pushed us into new technology regarding passport issuance. She got us to adopt a machine readable passport. She was convinced that this was the right thing to do. She also was convinced that these new procedures were her lifeline to staying in that job. But, that aside, she was the person who said that that was the right way to go, and she arranged for us to develop this process. She forced it to happen.

I understood that, too, because there is a peak season when people apply for passports. When it's the busy season, everybody in the Passport Office pitches in. This may involve stuffing envelopes. I think that everybody stuffed envelopes. Whatever needed to be done, we got the work out the door. The idea was that there's a U.S. citizen out there, and we basically promised to provide him with service. When you consider that somebody is applying for a passport, say, in Des Moines, IA (Iowa), to the clerk of court, and the application has to be sent to Chicago where the passport is processed, put together, and mailed back to Des Moines, this is a critical service. We could do this the same day, if there were an emergency. We always had this criteria. If you had plane tickets already issued and you had your documentation, we would issue you a passport on the same day. Frances Knight provided service at a time when no one else thought about it.

Q: This was something I always used to tell my colleagues. I had the highest respect for this kind of service, because it delivered to our clients. As a matter of fact, sometimes we would get requests for somebody who couldn't get a passport on time. We would put together a passport without a picture and would add the picture at the airport.

TRUITT: We had cases of people who had lost their passports and couldn't get their photographs. We would get out their original application. The second photograph was always on the file copy of the application. We would make a copy of that good photo on the file copy, put that bad copy on the file copy, and put the good photo into that person's passport. There was a way to do it, and we then gave the passport to the person at the airport door.

In fact, this was the lynchpin of the reputation of the Passport Office. That also tended to hold off a lot of people who despised Frances Knight. You couldn't get around the fact that she delivered the product, that is, the passport.

Q: This was the root of her power.

TRUITT: She also had another advantage. She was financially independent. Her husband was Wayne Parrish, who was the publisher of a group of highly successful flight magazines. It used to be that each year, of the 10 houses in Washington that were considered the best, the house of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Parrish was always listed. From my perspective, Frances Knight had great, financial independence and, therefore, could exercise great internal power in the Passport Office.

Q: Michelle, we'll stop at this point. Next time we'll pick it up at the point which we touched on, the end of the time when Frances Knight was the Director of the Passport Office. I would also like to talk about your perspective regarding her relationship with another, major figure in consular work, Barbara Watson, the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. We can talk about that in this period of the late 1970s.

***

Today is October 28, 1997. Barbara Watson was the head of Consular Affairs for quite a few years, off and on. For many of us she was considered to be the most influential person in developing a more professional and respected corps of Consular Officers within the Foreign Service. Her tussle with Frances Knight is sort of legendary. Could you talk about this from your perspective? Could you describe anything that you observed and give me any stories that you heard?

TRUITT: People who worked in the Passport Office during this time, by and large, led an insular life. Very few people in the State Department from outside that milieu came to the Passport Office. We had our own set of offices at 1425 K St., NW, in Washington, DC. There were no other State Department offices anywhere near us. Consequently, we were truly separate and apart. The only time that we really saw our colleagues from within the Bureau of Consular Affairs was if we were fortunate enough to go to some type of consular meeting. These meetings were held periodically, and we used to fight over who got to go. For a long time I was never in a position where somebody might say, "Gee, Michelle Truitt should make this trip" to this or that consular conference.

Barbara Watson kind of shook the tree in the consular world and said: "Let's get a consular life here. We need a consular perspective." In fact, I have a wonderful story which I still tell people. I don't know whether it's true or not, but, even if not, it's still a wonderful story. The story goes that Barbara Watson was very angry when she heard that in one of our posts in Saudi Arabia a private American citizen came in and needed to send a cable to the U.S. Under the regulations, we had to charge that person for the cable. So we asked a Foreign Service National [FSN] employee working for us to explain in Arabic that we needed this person to pay us $15 to send an interested party cable. We received the money from this person. Walking by at this time when the money was being paid was one of the political officers who just burst out laughing. When asked why he laughed, he said: "Something really funny happened." So the consular officer went to him later and said: "What was so funny?" The political officer said: "You don't know what your FSN said?" The consular officer said: "No. I just told this person that he or she would have to pay for the cable." The political officer said: "That's not what the FSN said. What he said was: 'The consular officer needs a bribe.'" So he got the money.

Q: Oh, God!

TRUITT: When Barbara Watson heard this story, she said: "We need language training for our consular officers. We cannot have our officers embarrassed in this way." We knew that we were doing something that was on the published schedule of fees. Barbara Watson was a real major shaker in that regard.

It was the first time that anyone had said that we needed language training across the board for consular officers, no matter where they were going.

She also began urging Congress to appropriate funds to hold consular conferences. At virtually all of the consular conferences I attended during Barbara Watson's tenure, there were representatives from the different committee staffs in Congress. Frances Knight always maintained that kind of interaction with Congress. She had the very strong view that the Passport Office needed to be heard. However, this was about the only kind of activity that I saw. In fact, I guess that I attended my first consular conference in 1977 or 1978.

The relationship between Barbara Watson and Frances Knight was very acrimonious. Frances Knight had her own power base in Congress. Barbara Watson could not develop an overall, integrated position, as it were, for the Bureau of Consular Affairs. There were no Foreign Service Officers assigned anywhere in the Passport Office. Nor was it considered by the Passport Office a good thing if you were a Civil Service employee and were found to have applied for a job elsewhere in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. You were considered a traitor to Frances Knight.

I remember a very good friend of mine had a new boss who was unusual. It's a kind word to say unusual. The new boss singled out my friend as his very senior whipping boy. This friend of mine applied for a job in the Visa Office. Everyone was stunned that he had done this. His boss actually called someone in the Visa Office and said that he understood that my friend was a candidate for a position in that office. He said: "If you take him, you'll be sorry because he just doesn't do much here." I'll always credit Dick Scully with saying: "Well then, you know, if you lose him, you won't miss him." [Laughter]

There were great stories of tension between the Passport Office and other offices in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. In fact, Barbara Watson took on a very interesting project. She took an outward approach that she was above this locking of horns, because she was the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, and Frances Knight was just the director of one of her offices. Whenever there was an extremely difficult fuss, Barbara Watson had one of her Deputy Assistant Secretaries basically take on the discussion of that issue. None of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries was especially successful in doing this, except for Robert Hennemeyer. Hennemeyer, whom I consider a wonderful drafting officer and a man with a very good sense of humor, regularly drafted the exchanges of memoranda between Barbara Watson and Frances Knight. They were indeed superb. If you could just get hold of them, you'd laugh a lot.

Barbara Watson hated working in this environment because she knew that it wasn't healthy, and it made her work much more difficult. However, these exchanges went on. In fact, they didn't stop until Frances Knight was mandatorily retired because of her age.

Q: My understanding is that Barbara Watson, as you say, who probably had more clout than anybody in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, was never able to control Frances Knight or make her into what she technically was, Barbara's subordinate.

TRUITT: Frances Knight was very institutionally savvy. She always had very good relationships with whoever was the Under Secretary for Management. Also, she was very careful to explain that those ties were strong and that she also had good ties in Congress. If Frances Knight didn't get the support she wanted, Members of Congress would lumber in and take on the Under Secretary for Management. So I think that Barbara Watson found that she could not get around all of those political strongholds which Frances Knight had available to her.

Q: The other thing that was obvious is that no Secretary of State was going to tangle with Frances Knight. Technically, Frances Knight worked for the Secretary of State. Frances Knight was fairly far down the line in the bureaucratic pecking order, but in the Washington frame of reference she loomed fairly large.

TRUITT: She did loom rather large. However, I'm not sure that if I had been the Secretary of State, I would have looked on the Passport Office as an area in which I would invest much time. Anyway, the primary function of the Passport Office was to issue passports so that people could travel abroad. That happened regularly and well. When you think of everything else that the Secretary of State had to take on, the passport function had to be a fairly minor matter, by comparison. Surely, if an Under Secretary for Management was going to coast comfortably on passport matters, why would the Secretary of State get involved in them?

Q: I agree.

TRUITT: At times the passport function reached the Under Secretary level. You could always see where that was. It was an interesting problem.

Q: In a way, as we mentioned before, through a series of judicial decisions, the Passport Office became more of a production process, rather than a policy process.

TRUITT: However, most of those issues really came up after Frances Knight retired. Most of the important cases on loss of citizenship and on how a passport could be denied or revoked were legal issues which basically were more center stage after she retired in 1977, I believe.

Q: I thought that the major policy issue was something which happened in the 1960s, wasn't it? I probably have the name wrong, but was it the Schneider decision?

TRUITT: The Schneider case was resolved in the 1960s. However, I believe that the most important case involving nationality is known as the Terrazas case. I saw this case argued before the Supreme Court, long after Frances Knight retired. That case dealt with whether Terrazas intended to lose his American nationality. Other decisions on nationality had considered other sections of the law, such as whether an individual had voted in a foreign country and whether he ran for and won an election in a foreign country. The decision on the Oakville Regents case was handed down during Frances Knight's tenure as Director of the Passport Office. However, the issues at this time were basically more involved with nationality issues, rather than passport entitlement matters.

In fact, Frances Knight was not as heavy handed on a lot of those legal issues, as I would have otherwise thought, as I got to know the process better.

Q: What did you do after Frances Knight was more or less forced to retire?

TRUITT: The first thing that happened was the arrival of Loren Lawrence as the Director of the Passport Office. Shortly thereafter, there was a new Deputy Director of the office, Robert Lamb. Both of them were career Foreign Service Officers and both later became ambassadors. Bob Lamb was later Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security. I believe that he was also Assistant Secretary of State for Administration when he still had Diplomatic Security as a sub-function under him.

With the appointment of these two people, we saw a different direction in the whole Passport Office, including, almost immediately, a reorganization. It was very clear to me later that Barbara Watson was waiting for Frances Knight to retire. No matter how you looked at it later, her intent then was to break up the Passport Office and to divide it in a way that no one could ever have the kind of power that Frances Knight had had in the past. I kind of looked at it as a rather childish reaction by Barbara Watson. In fact, over time I believed that she never did get over what Frances Knight had done. It seemed that she could never get over some feeling of suspicion about whoever she placed in that job or regard that person as other than Frances Knight.

I didn't respect Barbara Watson as much later as I watched her performance. I found that her problems with Frances Knight had, indeed, torn at her, and she couldn't let them go. In the final analysis Barbara Watson, in fact, lost this contest with Frances Knight because she could never let this conflict go. I remember what Bob Brand [a Foreign Service Officer] said to me one day when he came back to the Department and called on Barbara Watson. He said: "She thinks that I'm Frances Knight." I looked at him and said: "I would never think that you're Frances Knight." He said: "She just can't get over all of the times that Frances made her feel small. She had lost what she knew was a very serious, bureaucratic battle and she couldn't get over the fact that I had come from the Passport Office."

With Lorie Lawrence it was kind of a refreshing, different direction in the Passport Office until he went off to be Ambassador to Jamaica. He indeed created a very lively atmosphere in which to work.

Q: He's a lot of fun to work with.

TRUITT: He is a fun man. He also understood the political process and Capitol Hill in a way that made it a lot of fun to work in the Passport Office.

Shortly after Lorie became the Director of the Passport Office, President Carter said that on a certain day in September, all Executive Orders which were Emergency Executive Orders would expire. Well, at that time, the requirement to hold a U.S. passport to enter or depart from the United States was not a legal requirement in the sense that it was required by statute. It was based on an Emergency Executive Order. That Emergency Executive Order expired.

We worked very diligently to put together a package to go to Congress. Lorie Lawrence had made a number of good friends there. One of them, in fact, was a Congressman from Pennsylvania, whose name I don't remember, but who was Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Lorie Lawrence and I went up to Congress one bright day with this package. We met with the Congressman, who said: "Right, this is absolutely the right thing to do." We sat down with one of his legislative assistants, who took all of the work we had done and put it into statutory form. The Congressman then said: "We'll introduce it and attach it as a 'rider' to such and such a bill and pass it today." Lorie and I went up into the spectators' gallery. The bill was introduced, and we watched the House of Representatives pass it.

Q: This was something which actually was a major matter. It potentially could affect millions of people.

TRUITT: That's right. And Lorie said: "Wasn't that fun?" I said: "What a day!" He said: "Yes. This is kind of the way things should be handled." Lorie knew where to go. He could smile and get things done. This experience was a very nice change. Lorie was Director of the Passport Office for a time. I then left the Passport Office. Lorie sent me over to work in Barbara Watson's office, when she was Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs.

At about that time we had begun to negotiate what are now known as the exchange of penal sanctions treaties. Barbara Watson's office needed a lawyer to help put together a strategy on how to implement those treaties, including how much time it would take and how quickly we could apply them in our relations with Mexico. I was detailed over to Barbara Watson's office for almost a year. I worked on the exchange of penal sanctions issues and a variety of other matters.

Then Lorie Lawrence left to be Ambassador to Jamaica. I went back to the Passport Office and worked for Bob Lamb, who was then the director of the office. In fact, I went into a newly reorganized Passport Office which had lost all of its foreign affairs functions. The division that had dealt with foreign operations had been subsumed into a smaller organization. I thought that this was one of the most interesting reorganizations I had ever seen.

There had been an Office of Special Consular Services with about 30 people in it. There had been the Foreign Operations Division, which had about 50 people. These two organizations were brought into what is now known as the Office of Overseas Citizens' Services, or OCS.

Q: I'd like to take a couple of steps back. First, when Lorie Lawrence came in as Director of the Passport Office, Frances Knight had retired. She had built up a cadre of people who were intensely loyal to her. Was there then the equivalent of an old guard in the Passport Office who formed in a square and would not accept changes? Did you see these people who were still loyal to Frances Knight creating a bureaucratic problem?

TRUITT: I did not think that people were intensely loyal to Frances Knight, except for whoever was her deputy and the Chief of the Foreign Operations Division, plus perhaps three or four directors of passport agencies, who were very loyal to her. The loyalty was right at the top of the Passport Office, because Frances Knight had rewarded those people whom she thought she could trust and who would do her bidding without question.

However, most people in the Passport Office did not like working for her. They thought that it was truly an unpleasant place to be, because she was so tyrannical. She surrounded herself with her very favorite people. I would say that most people in the Passport Office were delighted when she finally retired. As I recall, the day after she retired, there was a very large party in the office, which many people attended, because they believed that they had finally been set free.

In fact, many people, including me, always looked at the State Department with some degree of distaste. People in the Department knew how difficult it was to work in the Passport Office and how badly Frances Knight treated people who her work force. Yet no one in the Department was basically willing to do much about this situation. So everyone in the office felt they had been set free, except for a handful of people who had tied themselves to her, hoping that she would help them to get their next assignment or their next promotion. I could have counted these people on my hand at the time. Everyone else said: "Thank you. It is now over."

Q: I would like to turn to the treaties on the exchange of prisoners, or whatever you call it.

TRUITT: The treaties on the exchange of penal sanctions.

Q: Could you explain what these treaties involved, what drove them, why this question came up at this time, and your experience in dealing with them?

TRUITT: There were two, separate problems that drove the treaties on the exchange of penal sanctions. The first problem, I believe, dealt with a group of five young American women who were traveling in Turkey and who were arrested for carrying hashish. I think it was a group of five, although I could be wrong.

Q: As I recall it, they were traveling in a Volkswagen bus, or something like that.

TRUITT: Yes. The penalties in Turkey for possession of any type of narcotics are very extreme. These young women were tried, convicted, and sentenced to 20-years-to-life, an incredible amount of time, at least by our standards in the United States. On top of that, prison conditions in Turkey are best described as unique. They are truly primitive. There were many articles in the American press on what these American women were suffering and the conditions which they had to endure. Basically, the Turks said, and that was very logical, these women were traveling in Turkey and were subject to Turkish laws and Turkey's system of justice.

At the same time as well, I can remember that the New York Times carried an article in the Sunday Magazine, describing prison conditions in Mexico. Again, they were unique. I remember a description of a wealthy drug lord, who had been convicted for involvement in the drug traffic. He moved into the jail with his family and his own herd of cattle. He lived there very comfortably, although not as comfortably as he would have been outside of prison. The descriptions of that prison pictured a prison system where the families of the inmates brought them food and medicine, or they didn't get any. Basically, nothing was provided to the inmates, who were simply thrown into this jail. If the inmates couldn't look after themselves, that was their problem. Conditions like that reportedly applied throughout Mexican prisons.

At this point, there were hundreds of American prisoners in Mexican jails, most of them for narcotics violations. A few of them had committed murders and other crimes.

So, at the time that we had this relatively small case of these American women in a Turkish jail, we had this comparatively huge number of Americans in Mexican jails. There was no way that we could provide them relief.

Q: This was also the time when much of the narcotics traffic amounted to relatively small doses of marijuana. Students were carrying it all over the place. This was not yet the time of the big, cocaine cartels.

TRUITT: Most of these Americans had been arrested having marijuana in their possession for personal use, or small amounts of marijuana which they were going to sell to somebody else. The amounts of marijuana were not large, and, by our standards, the punishments being meted out were very, very harsh. Conditions in the penal institutions in many foreign countries were unreal to us. They had nothing to do with how we understood penal institutions.

So there was an interesting fiction created. Obviously, the best thing to do was to have people serve out their sentences in their home country. We had the initial model treaty, which was approved by the U.S. Senate. It allowed us to go out and negotiate these treaties, country by country.

Q: Do you know the history of this idea? Had it been tried out elsewhere, or were we the only ones involved? What was the genesis of this?

TRUITT: I don't remember that. I remember the genesis of how we created the AIT, the American Institute in Taiwan, and where that model came from. I remember working on that but I can't remember how we got to the treaty on the exchange of penal sanctions.

Q: Anyway, the Senate had passed some kind of resolution, telling us to go ahead and do it?

TRUITT: Right. We had the authority to go ahead and negotiate a treaty on the exchange of penal sanctions. The first treaties of this kind which we negotiated were with Turkey and Mexico. We had to work out how we would get people down there and how we could be sure that, if our representatives saw a U.S. citizen in jail there, we would be able to advise him how the exchange of penal sanctions treaties worked. We sought to ensure that, if he took the opportunity to say: "Yes, I want to come home under such a treaty," he understood that he still had to go to jail and what all of his responsibilities were. We had to set up a framework agreement that we could publish in the Federal Register so that we would issue implementing regulations for such a treaty. Consequently, I spent a large part of my time working on that particular framework and those regulations.

Q: You must have had to work very closely with the U.S. Department of Justice on this, because they would essentially be picking it up at the other end, when these prisoners came back to the U.S. Who was responsible for putting these prisoners into an American jail when they came back?

TRUITT: The U.S. Department of Justice was responsible. The Department of Justice knew that it would get U.S. citizens back from foreign jails. However, they worked much more actively on sending Mexican citizens back to Mexico. We had a large number of Mexican citizens in American jails. If we had this treaty, then Mexicans could return to Mexico. So the U.S. Department of Justice officials spent time arranging how they would return foreign nationals to their countries. They were not very concerned, because they knew what was going to happen. They knew how to put people in jail and how we would work that out. That was no problem.

Q: Were there any particular problems in doing this, other than making sure that everything was well documented and well anticipated in the law? Were there any particular problems?

TRUITT: The biggest problem that we anticipated but which did not arise was whether we would get enough funding from Congress to pay for implementing this series of treaties. How would we know how much it was going to cost to send people to those countries, just to get the process started? This was really the biggest issue that we had because no one in Congress was opposed to the exchange of penal sanctions. No one in Congress found this problem difficult to deal with. The only question was would we be able to fund this process well.

As you recall, Ron Somerville, who was the Executive Director of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, was always very, very good at ensuring that our funding was sufficient and that that worked out. Basically, that was not a difficult problem. It went straight ahead.

Q: How about problems from the Mexican and Turkish side? As a person who worked on this matter, how did you find that the Mexicans and Turks felt about this?

TRUITT: They were delighted with this proposal, because it meant that press attention to this matter would go away, and those terrible articles critical of them would stop. Basically, they didn't care. They felt that we were kind of funny people because our drug laws were so timid. They just sort of shrugged their shoulders at our attitude. However, they were easy to negotiate with.

In fact, once we began the negotiations, we then went to Peru and Thailand. Now we have a host of these treaties on the exchange of penal sanctions.

Q: Did you ever have an impression on how well these treaties were implemented? Did these treaties do what we hoped they would do?

TRUITT: These treaties worked out even more efficiently than we had hoped. American prisoners so despised these foreign jails that, in fact, they would just say: "Give me the paper to sign. How quickly can you get me out of here?" And the process went very, very smoothly.

Q: Did you ever get a sort of after the game report on whether these prisoners served their sentences in the United States? Did they tend to get out of prison earlier?

TRUITT: I don't know, because I only worked on negotiating the treaties. I was engaged on that job for, maybe, nine months. I was called into someone's office one day and was told: "Your boss from the Passport Office," who was then William Wharton, "is going on a six-week training program. You are to go back and take over running the Legal Division of the Passport Office. Furthermore, you have to move the Legal Division out of its present offices to an office half its size. Please get this done in the next six weeks. Thank you for all you've done for us." With that, I was gone. I never looked back on it and never thought of it again.

Q: When was this that you were transferred? You said that you headed a legal office.

TRUITT: It was the Legal Division of the Passport Office.

Q: Which handled passport services?

TRUITT: Right. Then were then about 50 people in the Legal Division, so it was a large division dealing with a variety of issues. I had been sent over to work on these other issues. Now we needed to get other things done, so I was just sent back to handle them. I went to do that and never thought further about the exchange of penal sanctions.

Q: Moving an office to a smaller space is probably the greatest strain on any supervisor. That is not much fun.

TRUITT: It was interesting for us because this was the time when the old Bureau of Cultural Affairs was being transferred to USIA [United States Information Agency]. When that occurred, the Bureau of Cultural Affairs had office space on the fourth and fifth floors of the Department of State. As CU, as the Bureau of Cultural Affairs was known, moved out of the Department of State, the Bureau of Consular Affairs, for the first time, was given a significant amount of space within the main State Department building. Until that time, the Bureau of Consular Affairs had a small, executive office for the Assistant Secretary in charge of it and a small office for Ron Somerville, the Executive Director of CA, as well as a very small amount of space for the Office of Special Consular Services.

I don't know how it was worked out in terms of Department politics. However, the Bureau of Consular Affairs got the space. This area needed to be rehabilitated. At the same time, there was empty office space in Rosslyn [on the south side of the Potomac River, opposite the Georgetown area of the District of Columbia]. The quicker they could get us into this space in Rosslyn, the quicker the Department could stop paying rent for the space where we were. In fact, this was the traditional kind of swing space that everyone dreads. It was not designed for our needs. It was small, cramped, and, on top of that, it had never been cleaned. So it was an interesting experience to move there. Then Bill Wharton went off to his training course.

I took the three or four senior managers of the Passport Office, and we walked through the space. I said: "This is all we have. Your job is to leave behind as much as we possibly can in the old office space. I want bookshelves and safes left behind, because the rest of our office furnishings have to fit in here when we move. If they don't fit, they get thrown out. So you have to understand the parameters of this move." They just looked at me. I said: "This is all the space we have."

So we made this move. We spent a good month going through files, papers, and bookshelves, throwing stuff out and just leaving things behind, so that we could move into that swing space.

Q: You say swing space. What does that mean?

TRUITT: It was temporary space, to be occupied for a short time. We were to be there for two months, or long enough for us to get out of the building where we were. This ensured that we would not have to pay the rent. However, we had enough time so that the space where we were ultimately going could be repaired and redecorated. It was temporary space, which we always referred to as the swing space. We would swing into this space, wait for a while, and then go out again. We were only in this space for two months.

Indeed, a lot of people in the Passport Office never forgave me for the move. They held me personally responsible for what I had done. [Laughter] I just laughed. There was nothing that anyone could ever do about it.

After that we moved into the space in the main Department of State building which had been designated for us.

Q: After this did you become deputy to Bill Wharton as Director of the Passport Office when he came back, or did he go somewhere else and you stayed on? How did that work out?

TRUITT: I had been his deputy before I went over to work on the exchange of penal sanctions matter. I remained his deputy until the Consular Affairs reorganization was implemented. As part of this reorganization, the Foreign Operations Division went to that new office. However, the legal function was reorganized. All of the work that was anti-fraud related was separated out from the other, legal work. It really wasn't considered so much legal work as it was an operational function. This had grown tremendously. The anti-fraud activities took on some new dimensions, especially when we understood the use being made of fraudulent passports for narcotics trafficking.

As part of the reorganization, the legal affairs part was reduced in size, and anti-fraud efforts were moved out and made into a separate function. So we had a new Legal Office which Bill Wharton continued to run. We had another new office, called the Operations Office. I became the director of that office. We had a fraud function and liaison with clerks of court and postal facilities which accepted passport applications. About 80 to 90 percent of passport applications are accepted by postal clerks or clerks of court. I also had liaison responsibilities with the facilities that then issued passports in American Samoa, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. I was also responsible for the issuance of all diplomatic and official passports and passports generated by special requests from Congress. I was also responsible for what was then called the clearance function. That involved the ability of all Passport Agencies and Foreign Service posts abroad to take a passport application and clear it through the lookout system.

That was the new office. I became its head. Consequently, I ended my functions as a lawyer and never really returned to being a lawyer again.

Q: When did you take over these new functions?

TRUITT: In 1978 or 1979, somewhere during that period.

Q: I'm just getting the principal points of that. You did this until about when?

TRUITT: I did that until September, 1982, when I left the Passport Office and went to the Senior Seminar.

Q: Were there any difficulties or advantages when you took over the Operations Office? You said that about 90 percent of the passport applications were received from the public by postal clerks or clerks of court. How did this work?

TRUITT: There are post offices and courthouses throughout the country, which are designated to receive passport applications. The clerks in these offices are trained specifically to accept passport applications. They have no authority to approve an application but they can accept it. There is an acceptance fee, which is paid, whether you apply at the office of a clerk of court, a post office, or a Department of State Passport Agency. That money then goes directly to that courthouse or it goes to the postal system. This was basically the best way to serve the traveling public. There are county courthouses in every county. There are post offices in every town. This was the best way to make it possible for the public to travel only a short distance to apply for a passport.

Q: And it brought in a certain amount of money to the people who accepted these applications? This wasn't just another job for the people concerned?

TRUITT: It earned a certain amount of money for these courts or for the Postal Service overall, although I must say that during the whole time I was involved in it, those offices always said that it was "too little money for too much work." I don't know whether that was right or wrong. However, in my view, once you understand the process, it was not particularly complicated to be an acceptance agent. However, if you don't get a passport application very often, this effort can be a real time stopper.

Q: Yes, because you're not used to the routine. Although this was not a fancy function, how did you find the postal clerks and the clerks of court? Were there problems with them, or did they seem to respond to this type of work?

TRUITT: Generally, I think that they enjoyed it. It was a change of pace for them. It amounted to a service to their local communities. In fact, it was like a lot of other things. If somebody told you that that is what your job is, you just do it. We found, over time, that in most of the courthouses, as well as in the post offices, one or two of the people had been trained to handle passport applications. In fact, we started some very good training programs. We see now that there is one, full-time employee in every passport agency who is responsible for liaison with the clerks of court and the postal clerks in arranging for the training and travel which we provide. There is always the possibility of talking with these people. This was my direct line service. It has become a very stable and sure way by which passport applications are processed.

Q: In connection with American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands, did you have any special problems? I am thinking particularly of American Samoa, where there are so many close family relationships. We have had a lot of trouble with visas for Samoans. I was wondering whether passports fell into this category. This can involve both corruption and also a challenge to be nice to people. Was this a problem?

TRUITT: American Samoa is just a short boat ride away from Western Samoa, which is a separate country. In fact, as you said, there are families, some of whose members live in American Samoa and others of whom live in Western Samoa. In this connection this created a lot of difficulties for all of the passport issuing facilities. We looked at four territories in particular: American Samoa, the Territory of Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. These had four passport issuing offices.

In American Samoa, we had difficulty because we just didn't feel that we got the training that we needed. We were not convinced that we were getting the quality of product that we needed to issue those passports. This led to an interesting question because Diego Asencio, the then Assistant Secretary of Consular Affairs, took the position that we needed to consider all of the issuing functions for those four passport issuing offices.

We began with American Samoa. In fact, my office was charged with the responsibility of putting together a study on whether the authority to issue passports in American Samoa should be withdrawn. This was a very sensitive political issue, because the governor of American Samoa was directly responsible for the office. This was a patronage office. It created jobs and also invested power. So my office prepared a recommendation from Assistant Secretary Asencio to the Secretary of State that the passport issuing authority be withdrawn from American Samoa.

I remember this distinctly because, of course, with all of these recommendations, there were tapes on which we stated why we thought that this passport issuing authority should be withdrawn. Lo and behold, the Secretary of State agreed, and the governor of American Samoa was advised that the passport issuing authority in that territory was being withdrawn. No one was more horrified than I that the whole package of material went to the governor of American Samoa.

Q: Normally, the background material is for the information of the person making the decision. However, you don't send this material to the person against whom the decision is being made.

TRUITT: Of course, this package came back to me, addressed to Mrs. Michelle Truitt, Director of the Operations Office of the Passport Office, with the comment: "How could you possibly allow this to happen?" I said: "Wait a minute, I didn't allow this to occur. I prepared the package. Ambassador Asencio signed it. It went to the office of the Secretary of State. I never saw the decision. The Secretary of State sent the decision out". You may remember that I said one day: "We never got back any signed copies of the decision." We all went out, and people just shrugged it off and said: "Don't worry about it." And people never said another word.

However, the governor of American Samoa came to Washington, among other things, to talk to us about this matter. I can remember Assistant Secretary of State Diego Asencio saying to me: "Michelle, this is not going to be a pleasant meeting with the governor." I said: "Right, but at least he knows what we know. That is, we believed that we could not trust the documentation supporting the issuance of passports in American Samoa. Not necessarily because it had been faked, but because this involves a familial situation. People just travel back and forth between American and Western Samoa. We have to step back and let someone else review those documents. We want this to be done in Honolulu. We are guaranteeing service there."

We were fortunate at the time because due to the way the airline industry worked, in order for people from American Samoa to go anywhere, they basically had to go to Honolulu to get an international flight to go on from there. So this decision was not going to inconvenience them very much. I can remember when that controversy began. Then, right after that, we said that, for efficiency, we would do the same thing for the passport issuing office in Agana, Guam, which we did. Then we did the same thing for the U.S. Virgin Islands and, lastly, for Puerto Rico. We brought all of that passport issuance authority back to domestic, passport issuing agencies.

Now, I believe, passport issuance for Guam and American Samoa is handled in Los Angeles and, for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, in Miami. There is no longer any out island passport issuance authority. These changes, in each case, involved a political discussion and took a lot of time to complete, because none of those territories wished to give up that authority.

Q: Did you have responsibility for following up on allegations of fraud in your bailiwick? I thought that you mentioned that previously.

TRUITT: Yes. I had responsibility for such matters in connection with passport issuance.

Q: Can we talk about the status of fraud during the period 1978 to 1982 in connection with the issuance of passports?

TRUITT: The status of fraud changed because people became more sensitive about the misuse of the passport as a document. One thing that I always found was that the number of cases of fraud that we detected grew in absolute numbers but never in terms of percentages, during the whole time that I was concerned with it. There were larger numbers of fraud cases because we began to issue a much larger number of passports. However, year in and year out, the number of detected cases of fraud was less than one percent of all of the passports issued. In fact, the percentage was something like .01 percent of all passports issued.

However, we later found that there could be a pretty startling issue behind the appearance of fraud. I would say that two-thirds of the cases of fraud still involved the issuance of passports to people who were not U.S. citizens but who were trying to become U.S. citizens through possession of a passport. The remaining one-third involved people who were involved in some kind of criminal activity. These cases involved a lot of narcotics trafficking and white collar crime.

Some of the cases involved people moving money and jewels illegally. One of my favorite cases concerned a man who was a high profile criminal figure. His passport had been seized by a U.S. court, which has the power to do that. It can let you out on bond if you turn over your passport to the court. We were notified that the passport involved in this case was in the hands of the court. We added this individual to our lookout system accordingly. Within three days after that I remember reading a newspaper article that the man involved had been released and was out and about. Then we were told that he had fallen overboard from a ship and was reported lost at sea.

The then Assistant U.S. Attorney was Larry Barcella, who now practices privately in Washington. I remember saying to Larry: "This report is a lie. He hasn't been 'lost at sea.' He's going to pop up somewhere. He will apply for a passport." Lo and behold if this guy didn't come in and apply for a passport a few months later. He was, indeed, alive and well. He was not aware of our system under which we could annotate the files. He popped up, applying for a new passport.

There was a lot of fraud in that way, involving people who were just trying to get out of the country. I would think that it is very similar to the Samuel Sheinbein case. The question is: "How do you get out of the country? How do you get out fast enough so that the government can't stop you?"

Q: We're talking about a young boy of Jewish ancestry who was involved in a very hideous...

TRUITT: He is allegedly involved in the murder of another teenager in Montgomery County, MD (Maryland). He is also alleged to have dismembered and burned the murdered person's body. The young man accused of this terrible crime is a U.S. citizen who fled to Israel. He did this very quickly. Had he not acted so quickly, his passport could have been revoked or his file annotated so that he couldn't get a passport. However, he fled the U.S. to avoid prosecution. He fled the country to avoid prosecution. The fraud frequently involved people who knew that they had turned in their passports. They would then lie on their application for a new passport, so there would be a second charge outstanding against them, because it is a felony to make deliberately false statements.

However, although the numbers of fraud cases went up, they never really changed in percentage terms during the whole period that I worked on such matters. It was just that the cases became more interesting.

Q: Did you find in places like the Philippines and other areas where passport forgers were getting more and more sophisticated as time went on, that this situation created a technological problem for you?

TRUITT: Regarding the many times that I was involved in anti-fraud cases in the Department, I always believed that the Filipinos and the Colombians were the best in their craft of forging U.S. passports. There were two other parts to that, too. During my tenure in the Operations Office in the Passport Office, I only saw a couple of attempts by anyone to counterfeit a U.S. passport. It was much easier to forge a passport than to try to create a new one.

Q: Could you explain the difference between forging and counterfeiting a U.S. passport?

TRUITT: A counterfeit U.S. passport involved an attempt to duplicate a passport book before any data is entered into it, so that it looks as if it came off the printing press at the Government Printing Office. A forged U.S. passport is normally one which has validly been issued to someone and is then changed or altered in some way. The photograph of the alleged bearer may be changed. The name, date, or place of birth of the alleged bearer is changed. That then becomes a forgery, in my mind, or an alteration. It is much easier to alter a valid U.S. passport than it is to try to create one out of whole cloth. However, some Filipinos and also Colombians are good at turning out such forgeries.

However, one of the things that we found with those alterations was that people who obtain those passports didn't necessarily want to use them to enter any part of the United States. They wanted those passports to facilitate their travel elsewhere in the world. In fact, I think that that was a very successful ploy. Once that forgery was made, it would perhaps get by a passport inspector in a country other than the United States. However, I don't think that it would pass muster before an immigration or customs inspector in this country. For years U.S. immigration and customs inspectors have received training on U.S. passports from the Department of State. U.S. immigration and customs inspectors are very sophisticated about what our documents look like, because they look at them all the time.

Q: Over a period of time, particularly during Frances Knight's tenure as Director of the Passport Office, the passport was changed, making it smaller, and putting in certain anti-forgery components. Did these changes seem to help?

TRUITT: They did help. When you look at the evolution of the passport, it had not changed a lot over a significant period of time. Frances Knight truly was at the forefront of the development of what is now called machine readable passport technology. I believe that as early as 1974, she began the development of the technology for designing the machinery for passport issuance. In fact, the design work and the development of the technology was all done in house in the Passport Division. It was not given out to the private sector with the request that printing firms bid on it. We were one of the first countries to come out with a machine readable passport, with machine readable data and with lamination over all of this personal data regarding the passport bearer on page one of the document. The lamination also covers the photograph.

Of course, the lamination over the photograph has given us problems for years and still is a pretty tricky item because you cannot put on a completely smooth laminate. The photograph always creates a ridge down one side and therefore makes a bubble in the laminate. This bubble also allows you to attack the photograph from the other side of the page. So there were problems with this technique. However, a whole new technology has been developed, and Frances Knight was pushing its development.

We were pushing the development of this technology by ourselves. It took quite a while for other agencies and other governments to appreciate what machine readable technology could do for you and how you could accumulate data more accurately. It was a very slow and expensive job to take a given passport agency and move it from the older to the newer technology. In fact, we completed this transition at a couple of passport agencies per year until the very end, when an acceleration of the process completed this task and the whole passport issuing system was using the same technology. You should keep in mind that even today, in 1997, most of our consulates abroad issue the old style, U.S. passport to anyone who applies for a passport outside the United States.

Q: Did you find that in your anti-fraud efforts, you were working with foreign governments and with their customs and immigration officials to make them aware of what we were doing? Were they aware of our efforts to have a unified type, machine readable passport?

TRUITT: That was not so much a function of what we saw happening in the late 1970s and the early 1980s as it was by the middle 1980s and ever since. I left the Passport Office in 1982 and returned in 1983 after attending the Senior Seminar. We had done some work at that time. We did, in fact, have a lot of discussion, back and forth, with the British and the Canadians. However, I didn't find that this effort was a dynamic, cohesive program and surely did not involve the energies that later on were brought to bear on it in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

Q: I know that, close to this time, and about when you left the Passport Office in 1982, I was detailed for a period of time to the Immigration and Naturalization Service [INS]. One of my goals was to develop a certain compatibility with the INS on their identity card, the so-called Green Card to document legal residents of the United States, and to use more or less the same technology we used with our passports in preparing this card. That is, making it machine readable.

I had absolutely no success at all in this effort. This was one of those cases where one government agency almost doesn't speak to another government agency when they are both doing much the same thing. I never quite understood the reason why this should happen, but there it was. Did you get involved with other government agencies in developing machine readable technology?

TRUITT: I got involved in that during my last assignment before I retired from the State Department. I think that I had many more successes than you experienced in the INS. So what you probably achieved was to persuade people at least to think about the subject. Obviously, this takes a while. People are so set in how to do this or that. You know that you are right, and it's hard for agencies to begin to link together.

I thought that our initial successes occurred during my first go around in this connection. I was in the Bureau of Consular Affairs on three different occasions during my career.

The United States Customs Service was much more interested in the direction we were moving in than the Immigration and Naturalization Service was at that time. What has happened, over time, has been that all of those agencies have, in fact, coalesced and have become much more integrated. In fact, there are now interagency task forces on which the chairperson is successively from the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Customs, and INS on all of these document-related issues.

So, over the span of about 15 years, we changed dramatically from agencies whose attitude was: "Wait a minute. I know that I'm right and I won't change" to agencies whose attitude is: "Wait a minute. We're all in this together. How do we make all of these different data bases work together as one?"

Q: You attended the Senior Seminar from 1982 to 1983. What did you get out of that?

TRUITT: I believe that I should explain how I applied for the assignment to the Senior Seminar. I remember that, back in 1981, a friend of mine said that he was going to apply for senior training and was going to go to one of the war colleges. I said: "You're not going to go to one of the war colleges. People in the Civil Service don't go to war colleges. " He said: "I'm going to do it anyway." He applied but didn't get the assignment.

It was then 1981. He and I were having lunch one day. I said: "I'm going to apply to go to one of the war colleges. Then, when I'm turned down, I'm going to file a complaint under the EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity act]. I'm going to file it because, first, they never take women and, second, they never take people from the Civil Service." I said: "I'm just going to file a complaint and make the State Department take notice that it really needs to rethink its training opportunities." He looked at me, laughed, and said: "Only you would think that way."

So when I got the application form, the instruction was that you had to put down two training choices. So I dutifully put down a war college and then I put down Senior Seminar, because you had to put down something. Then I sent off my application.

Well, at that time the Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs was Ambassador Robert Fritts. What I didn't know was that he had also chaired the selection committee for Senior Seminar candidates. I must say that we are still very close friends today. However, he was my boss and was one of the most demanding people for whom I have ever worked. He was also a very imaginative man. He would say: "Well, what about this and what about that?" Lo and behold, he called me into his office one day and said: "Congratulations!" He just beamed. I said: "Excuse me?" He said: "You're going to the Senior Seminar." I said: "What?" I really was surprised. He said: "Oh, yes, we considered three candidates and decided that we really need a mix of people to go, and you are 'it.'" He said: "We had had four people apply from the Civil Service. We had a slot for one Civil Service officer, and you were chosen."

I looked at him. I can still remember his comment. He got so angry at me. He said: "My God, you're a three-fer. In choosing you, we got a woman who is a consular officer and a member of the Civil Service." I said: "How many check-off's did you get?" He was so mad at me. He said: "You were the best candidate." Then I said: "Fine. That's Okay." I can still remember him looking at me and saying: "Oh, Michelle. Why do you fight things?" So that's how I got to go to the Senior Seminar. I still have the letter today, signed by Joan Clark, saying: "Congratulations, you have been accepted in the Senior Seminar." And off I went in September 1982.

Q: How did you find your year at the Senior Seminar?

TRUITT: It truly turned out, as virtually everyone describes it later, to be a magical year. There were 26 or 28 members of the class. Half of them came from the State Department. The other half came from a variety of other U.S. Government agencies. Traditionally, there was one officer each from the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. For the first time, we had a Coast Guard officer. We also had an officer from the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations], we had four officers from the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], and one officer from AID [Agency for International Development]. For the first time we had an officer from the National Security Agency. It was a very interesting, mixed bag of people. I can tell you now, because I'm the President of the Senior Seminar Alumni Association, how much the mix has changed. There were only two women in the Senior Seminar, when I attended it.

Q: I was in the 17th class at the Senior Seminar in 1974-1975. There was one woman in the class.

TRUITT: It is now very different. In fact, the other woman in my class was Genta Hawkins Holmes, now our ambassador to Australia. Before that, she was the Director General of the Foreign Service. We used to laugh, because there were just the two of us. Genta Hawkins is a very tall, blonde, elegant woman. She is 5' 10" tall or something like that. I am kind of short. We used to laugh because there were just the two of us among all of those men.

A couple of different things occurred. First, you realize how much you learn from each other, how much you begin to understand how other U.S. Government agencies work, how you look at those agencies, and how they look at you. Because you become such good friends and so quickly, you actually tell each other what you think, rather than dance around a given subject. I can remember one of my friends from the CIA explaining to me one day what he had done in his last assignment. I started to laugh. I said: "I was at the other end of what you were trying to do." So we walked through what I had done and what he was doing. We realized that if we'd only known and trusted each other, we could have made that whole process much more efficient and would have completed it a lot sooner.

Q: Could you describe what that process was?

TRUITT: No, I can't, because his was a world of highly classified, sophisticated monitoring functions which the CIA had. I was facilitating how some of those people would be there. Basically, we were discussing cover passports issued legally to people under identities which were not their own. However, I can't explain to you any further what he was doing.

Q: Oh, yes.

TRUITT: I laughed and said: "By the time I got from you what I needed to get this process done, we'd wasted three months. If we could only have chatted with each other, we would have saved time. I couldn't figure out what you were doing, and you couldn't figure out why I was such a fool that I couldn't get it done."

So that was a major aspect of what the Senior Seminar involved. Even today, many of those people are among my contacts in business or in the Government because of how we bonded as a group.

Another aspect was the access that you get because it is a very high profile seminar. We visited with state governors and with Mayor Jane Byrne in Chicago. We went out with the Army Corps of Engineers when the Mississippi River was in high flood and actually saw what they were trying to do. You can't do that as a private citizen and you often can't do it in a lot of training areas because you just don't have enough visibility or clout. We got to visit with people all over the country who were considered powerful or not particularly powerful. We got to understand what these people thought of the issues of the day and what they thought of how the federal government interacted with them on those issues. All of us could go back into any job we went to after that, especially from the college and going out into the country and really feel that we had felt the pulse of the country. So, on many levels, it truly was a unique experience. You don't realize how much it is until you go through it.

Q: Then where did you go in 1983, after you completed the Senior Seminar assignment?

TRUITT: As I was in the Senior Seminar in 1982, a friend of mine came up to me one day. He was going through his bid list, as Foreign Service Officers do. He said to me: "What are you going to do after the end of the Seminar?" I said: "I don't know. I don't want to go back to the Bureau of Consular Affairs. I would like to do something different." He said: "Here's a great job for you. You're a lawyer. The Director of the State Department Grievance Staff' is coming to see us. Why don't you see if you can become the next Director of the Foreign Service Grievance Staff? This job needs a lawyer." He said: "You surely understand the Foreign Service, Michelle." So I said: "Oh, okay."

So I made an appointment and went to see Ambassador Andrew Steigman, who was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel and responsible for grievances in the Bureau of Personnel. I applied for that job. And lo and behold, within 30 days I was given the job. So I knew from December 1983, that I would be the next Director of the Foreign Service Grievance Staff. That was where I went and, in fact, I was the Director of the Staff from 1983 to 1986.

Q: Could you explain what the grievance staff was and then, maybe, talk about whatever cases you can talk about and how it operated.

TRUITT: The Foreign Service grievance function is legislatively mandated. The mandate is currently set out in the Foreign Service Act [of 1980]. It really goes back to the early 1970s when a very fine Foreign Service Officer was regularly considered for promotion but was not, in fact, promoted. He was finally told that he was subject to mandatory retirement. He was retired but he did not seek redress because he said: "I went to see my official performance folder. In my folder are evaluation reports which are not mine. They belong to another officer and, from my perspective, an officer of inferior quality. That's why I believe that I was never promoted. Something needs to be done for me."

In fact, I was told that nothing was done on behalf of this officer, who ultimately committed suicide.

Q: This was a well-known case.

TRUITT: From that case came a grievance process internally within the Department of State. Let me backtrack for a little bit. The Department began a process and, right behind that, there was legislation passed by Congress which provided that there would be a grievance process available to all Foreign Service Officers. Under this procedure a Foreign Service Officer could file a grievance for a whole range of reasons. You couldn't present a grievance that you weren't being promoted and you couldn't present a grievance over your assignments. You could present a grievance about flawed evaluation reports. You could present grievances about certain financial matters. You could present grievances about any disciplinary actions proposed to be taken against you.

It was, in fact, a two-part process. There was a grievance staff that looked at all State Department grievance cases at an initial stage. The grievance could be resolved at that level. There was always a final decision by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Personnel. That decision could be appealed to the Foreign Service Grievance Board. This, in fact, took cases not only from the State Department but also from the Agency for International Development [AID], the Foreign Commercial Service [FCS], the Foreign Agricultural Service [FAS], and USIA [United States Information Agency]. However, the Grievance Staff, in fact, got a first look at all grievances filed by Foreign Service Officers in the Department of State.

Q: Could the State Department grievance staff sort of take a quick look and really settle the matter in a hurry, for example, on behalf of an officer who had somebody else's efficiency report in his folder? This is an obvious case today. In the old days, no sensitivity had yet developed to such matters. You can see that something is really screwed up and say: "Let's get on with this and do something." Or did the processing of such cases become very involved?

TRUITT: We could take that kind of action on cases which were the easiest to resolve, such as the case I mentioned above. In fact, in connection with this case there was no basis for taking action. Somehow, this case had never been prepared properly, documents had been lost, and nobody had ever taken care of the matter.

However, it took the Department awhile to develop a plan for handling grievance cases. I can remember that each year I would get a list of people whose whole, official personnel files had not been subject to the selection process, due to an error of one kind or another. The statement from the officer's Performance Evaluation Report at that time was: "We're sorry that you were not considered for promotion. This was an honest mistake. We're going to extend your competition year by one year. Or you may present a grievance case." These people didn't want to present a grievance case. They said: "I would like to be considered for promotion, please. I don't think that I would like to stand down for a year." We would say: "Okay," and we would reconstitute Selection Boards. This is still done now. We said to the reconstituted Selection Boards: "Come in. Throw in a real mix of those people and do it again. This person, in fact, is an innocent bystander who, in fact, has been disadvantaged." So you could do that.

Or we could take a case and say: "Let's settle this. Let's settle it that we can't give you a promotion, but we can do this or we can do that." Every week I would meet with Ambassador Steigman and would go through the cases I had. I would say: "Can we settle this case? Can we do this instead? Can we try to resolve this case as efficiently as possible?"

There were other remedies. However, over time they have become much more complex, as, I guess, happens to any kind of system as it begins to develop. The question becomes what is the appropriate remedy? However, we would hold reconstituted Selection Boards, if that is what a person wanted as a remedy. We would do that because they were entitled to this consideration.

Q: What were the bread and butter cases that were referred to you? What were some of the rarer cases which would be more sensational?

TRUITT: The most common cases involved people who, in fact, had presented grievances against their personnel evaluation reports. They complained that these evaluation reports were flawed and prejudicial. The largest, single group of grievances came from untenured junior officers who had been considered for but had not been recommended for promotion. I would say that half of the work dealt with allegedly flawed evaluation reports.

We also dealt with people who were being recommended for disciplinary action. You could get into some incredibly interesting, factual situations, none of which I could ever discuss, because the protections in the law are very clear. They provide that this procedure is not a public forum, and the person presenting a grievance is to be protected to the maximum extent possible, so that he or she can never be distinguished from anyone else in the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes. That is an absolute consideration.

TRUITT: You can talk about some of these cases and, indeed, some of the most flamboyant factual situations. However, you cannot discuss them in any form whatsoever unless the people involved go to court, and the court proceedings are a matter of public record. The first case that I handled eventually did go to court. In fact, I could discuss this case at any time, should I choose to do so. However, I never choose to discuss the cases in any way because I have always thought that that is what the professional person needed to reflect in that job.

Q: I understand. However, can we talk about generic type cases. I'm thinking that this was a period of time which has more or less continued, now that there is much more sensitivity on the part of those persons being considered for positions. I'm talking about allegations of discrimination in terms of race, sex, age, and so forth. How did you find these issues?

TRUITT: When I was working on the Grievance Staff, we were precluded from handling virtually all EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] complaints. Since that time, the law has been amended, and the Grievance Staff, in fact, can look at EEO type complaints as part of the grievance process. However, when I worked there, and with very few exceptions, we were precluded from considering that type of complaint. We were not precluded from suits filed by AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] on behalf of a whole group of complainants.

We had one such class action case which AFSA brought on behalf of Diplomatic Security officers. In this case AFSA claimed that the Department of State was discriminating against a whole class of security officers in the promotion process. In fact, that case was argued before the Grievance Board. However, cases like that were rare. I only saw two such cases that AFSA filed in the three years that I was the Director of the Grievance Staff.

Q: I retired from the Foreign Service at about this time and I've never had any personal experience with this process. However, I've heard many stories from people about the almost complete impossibility of getting rid of somebody who was regarded as incompetent or worse. All of the persons accused of these character failures presented a grievance, and the system was such that nothing would ever happen.

TRUITT: Well, a grievance will tie up somebody's departure from the Department of State because you're entitled to seek what is called prescriptive relief. That is, you have the right to remain on the Department's rolls until the grievance is resolved. That is fair because, if a person is successful in presenting his or her grievance, the last thing that you want is to have somebody off the rolls and not return. However, this is not a matter of right. You can seek relief. However, if the Department turns the grievance down, the Grievance Board can approve it. The Grievance Board is not required to grant that relief, either, and I have seen cases where the Grievance Board has denied relief, even though it allows the grievance to proceed.

So it is not true, in all cases, that people get to stay on the rolls and that they all win their cases. In fact, I have seen those cases go all over the map. However, you may have people who will literally go out on the street and say: "I have filed this grievance and I am still on the Department's rolls." They're not telling you the truth.

I remember the case of a person who filed a grievance which he lost, hands down. He walked out of the office and told everyone how Michelle Truitt had really botched that case and that he had won. That was what he was saying. [Laughter]

I just said to myself: "Okay," and went on. You hear some pretty delicious stories. There are also cases where people file grievances, and they prevail. Most of the time people prevail because their files are so poorly documented. The statements in the official performance folders in fact can't be substantiated. Consequently, the grievances are upheld.

I used to give a lot of lectures on this subject. I used to tell people: "Take a sample of 50 people. Some 49 of them are wonderful. One of them should not be in the Foreign Service. If you are wise, you will take 80 percent of your time and that of your staff in managing that one person. You'll either make that person better or you will have created a file from which I, as director of the Grievance Staff, can use to go back and say that the grievance has no merit. Then the person will be forced to resign from the Foreign Service, or the Grievance Board will find the grievance unmerited and say that the person involved is off the Department's rolls. However, if you leave me with incomplete information, I can assure you that, over time, the grievance will prevail. "

In fact, I remember one person who presented grievances at least 12 times on different issues. The disposition of the final grievance stated that she was off the Department's rolls. There are people who will play the system for all that it's worth. They will pull at every string that they can find. They are inadequate.

I would suggest to you from the outset that these are people who went through a fairly interesting process to join the Foreign Service. I would look at these people and think to myself: "How did they ever get in the Foreign Service?" No one ever goes back to the beginning and says: "Maybe we need to look at the criteria for how we evaluate people." People would always say: "Gee, Michelle Truitt, you are the easiest mark. These people file a grievance and they're here forever." I used to say to people: "Maybe we need to go back and see how they passed the oral exam to enter the Foreign Service."

Q: Was there ever any relationship between you, as director of the Grievance Staff, and the Board of Examiners of the Foreign Service?

TRUITT: No. I would have discussions with the Deputy Assistant Secretary supervising the work of my office. I said one day to Don Bouchard, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary: "I think that the most important thing we do is to hire people for the Foreign Service. I think that the first assignments we should make every year should be to the Board of Examiners. They should be people coming back here who have been newly promoted, and we should express our concerns to them."

Q: Unfortunately, the Board of Examiners is sort of a parking place between jobs. I know. I was once parked there. I worked there for a year. You end up with some good people and some not so good people in the Board of Examiners, because it's a place to put you, rather than really assign you.

TRUITT: And it's a place where we choose the future of the Foreign Service. I see that we make some interesting choices here. I had a conversation with one officer and I thought to myself: "How did this person get through the oral examination? This person is inarticulate. He cannot talk to me in complete sentences. How could this person become a junior officer?"

People say to me: "Oh, well, Michelle, we all make mistakes." That's right, and I make my share of them. However, please don't hold me responsible for a grievance process which I didn't legislate and for people who then inadequately document these inadequate officers.

However, we decided to let this go, because, as you know, I am fairly relentless on these issues, looking at it from another direction.

When people file grievances, I think that they have a 50-50 chance of winning those cases, because the personnel files have so many flaws in them. You can pull these out, and they survive and will continue on.

Keep in mind that we low rank very small numbers of people every year. You know, life goes on, and it's a very interesting process. No more than a dozen people are listed for selection out every year. I'll bet you that half of them will survive and remain in the Foreign Service because their folders are so poorly documented.

Q: Do you have the feeling that this is still the case? We just don't document cases very well. We're creating a flawed record which can be used to sustain someone who would otherwise be selected out.

TRUITT: I think that some managers do a better job than others. I think that, in fact, there will always be managers who don't prepare efficiency reports very well. An inadequate officer will stand a better chance later on of filing a successful grievance.

I have had people who came and talked to me. They have said: "I want to present a grievance on this matter." I say: "Well, if you want to waste your time, go ahead." In general, supervisory officers have gotten better at preparing personnel evaluations as well.

Q: Along with this has been the undercurrent of a feeling that if a person belongs to a minority group, a supervisor can't do much about it if he or she performs poorly, because the EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] system kicks in. There is a special advantage to belonging to a minority group because of social goals and all that. So somebody who, perhaps, shouldn't have been admitted into the Foreign Service but has, in fact, been accepted, is almost impossible to get rid of because of the system, even if he or she is sub-standard.

TRUITT: I have to look at this question from my experience. Most of the grievance cases with which I have dealt did not involve an EEO kind of process. These people, for the most part, were, in fact, white males. We had some women and some people who belonged to minority groups as well, but if you look back at that period, most of the people in the Foreign Service were white males. The grievance system was not really a tool for non-white males.

Q: I have known some white males who have filed grievance cases. Once they get into the grievance procedure, no matter whether they are right or wrong, this process almost seems to destroy many of them as effective officers. This grievance process is so absorbing that it seems to make them bitter. Whatever it is, it seems really to hurt their effectiveness.

TRUITT: The only people in whom I have seen that happen were those who also lost their grievance cases. They believed that they were right from the inception and that no one ever agreed with them. How could it possibly be that they're the only people who ever get it right? That makes people very bitter and very angry, because they believe that they should have prevailed. Since they didn't prevail, their careers stopped at a time when they were not ready to let their careers go.

I remember some of my grievants from the many years that I dealt with them. Their careers seemed to go on without any interruption. The people of whom I am thinking became very senior officers. Some of them became ambassadors and were very interesting people. They were very successful grievants. One of them came in to see me one day and said: "This grievance case made all the difference in my career. Things went on very well after we cleared up that one issue." So you could see that it could go both ways. However, people are naturally angry when they lose a grievance case. They believe, in their soul, that they are right. They know that they're right. I think that they must be angry. I think that it would take an extraordinary person to walk away from all of that, having spent months, if not years, in pursuing a grievance case, losing it, and then say: "All right. Everything's fine."

Q: I think too, probably, that my experience has been typical of what happens in the Foreign Service. You hear about the people who are bitter and unhappy about a grievance. The ones who win their cases go on, and you don't even notice it or, perhaps, know anything about it.

TRUITT: Right.

Q: We'll pick up this interview in 1986, after you left the Grievance Staff. Great.

***

Today is November 5, 1997. Michelle, you left the Grievance Staff in 1986. Where did you go after that?

TRUITT: In February or March of 1986, a new position was advertised in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Then Assistant Secretary Joan Clark had decided that she was going to take all of her consular anti-fraud effort, which at that time had been divided up among three separate offices, and put it into one office, dealing with all kinds of fraud activity involving U.S. passports, visas, and other citizenship matters in general. That job was created and advertised.

I applied for the job twice. The first time, the panel convened, and, I'm told, there was only one person found qualified for the job, so they readvertised it and got three people to apply. I was one of the three people and was selected and asked to begin on this job in June 1986.

Q: What was the title of this job?

TRUITT: The name of the office was the Office of Fraud Prevention Programs, known under the acronym of CA/FPT. I am told that it has changed a lot since I left that position. I was in that job from 1986 through 1990.

Q: So we'll talk about the 1986 through 1990 period. When you arrived in that office, what was the status of our anti-fraud efforts?

TRUITT: The efforts were segmented. There was a group of people who worked in the Office of Passport Services, who were primarily concerned with domestic threats against U.S. passports and especially with false applications. These people were also interested in how to prosecute and actually convict persons involved in such frauds, as well as setting standards on how that work would be done abroad. There was one officer in the Office of Overseas Citizens' Services who was primarily responsible for fraud in the award of Social Security benefits. Naturally, he worked very closely with the Social Security Administration. The third group of people working against fraud were in the Office of Visa Services. They were primarily concerned with the broad range of fraudulent attempts to obtain U.S. visas and/or to misuse visas.

This was a very interesting and mixed bag of people. Everyone from the Office of Passport Services was from the Civil Service. Everyone except one officer from the Office of Visa Services was from the Foreign Service. This person had been a Foreign Service Officer who converted to the Civil Service.

Q: We're talking about fraud. When you went to CA/FPT, did you find that there was any unified theme to the pursuit of fraud? Were there areas where you could apply the same rules and use the same people in what might have been equivalent to micro-copying? Were there established ways of doing this or was there a split-up between benefits, passport services, and visa services?

TRUITT: These efforts had always been segmented. I think that part of what Assistant Secretary Joan Clark was trying to get at was to see how the different aspects of anti-fraud activities developed from one case to another. At our posts abroad, most of which have one or maybe two consular officers, these officers are involved in all of these activities, every day. You can't segment your thinking as to how to handle your duties. We really needed the best educated, most highly trained, and most sophisticated anti-fraud efforts abroad. The best way to do that was to make sure that people thought of this as an integrated rather than a segmented approach. In other words, if we dealt with a passport problem, it was assigned to this person. If it involved a visa problem, the passport officer didn't need to worry about it. We needed to have a much more cohesive way of handling these problems. In this way, we would have a much better dialogue with other agencies in the federal government if we didn't have so many disparate groups, all from the same bureau, trying to send similar messages.

It was not so much that the technique involved in the fraud was not the same. Rather, the intent of what the fraud sought to accomplish was so different. Once Joan Clark had a good understanding of all of the consular systems and how they worked, she was convinced that they could be made to function more effectively.

Q: When you're talking about fraud, does this include corruption?

TRUITT: We also acquired the malfeasance portfolio, which covered corruption. That is correct. We were the office in the Bureau of Consular Affairs that coordinated very closely with our colleagues in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security on cases of alleged malfeasance by our own people.

Q: When you arrived back in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, Joan Clark was the Assistant Secretary in charge of the bureau. Before we get into some of the problems facing you, could you describe how Joan Clark operated and then your view of how effectively the bureau worked. You previously talked about how the Passport Office functioned under Frances Knight. Since then, life had gone on, and things had changed. Could you talk about your impression of the Bureau of Consular Affairs when you first arrived back in it?

TRUITT: For me it was very interesting because it was Joan Clark who hired me to direct the Grievance Staff. A few months after my arrival on the Grievance Staff, she became the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. So I was really pleased that I was going to get to work for her once again.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs had a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Ambassador Michael Newlin, under whom I worked directly. We also had deputy assistant secretaries for Overseas Citizen Services, Passport Services, and Visa Services. Joan Clark had a daily staff meeting. I guess that about 12 of us attended it every day. This meeting was attended by the deputy assistant secretaries, those of us who were concerned with the work of several offices, her Public Affairs Officer, and the Executive Director of the Bureau.

I would say that Joan Clark ran very crisp meetings that always got to the heart of things. I always used to think that people found her much more direct than they would ever have anticipated. They knew what she was after. She was always very interested in the different parts of the bureau. By the time I got there, she had been Assistant Secretary for some time. She obviously knew how the bureau worked, what she wanted, and where she would suffer frustrations. However, I always found her a very easy person to work for. She always told me exactly what she wanted and would say what she wanted. She might change her mind, but once she finished giving her instructions, there was no doubt about the objective. That made her very easy to work for.

Q: Where did consular operations fit, from your perspective, in the pecking order in the State Department?

TRUITT: The Bureau of Consular Affairs is a very interesting bureau because now, even more than it did then, it generates money for the Department. I guess that it also provides the face of the Department to our own citizens, through its contacts with them, as well as with foreign nationals. However, it is not generally considered a political mechanism, although I would say that there are some countries where our visa policies are the most important, political issue. I don't believe that within the Department, the Bureau of Consular Affairs is considered the leader among the various bureaus. I've always believed that the Princes of the Realm, as I used to refer to them, were the geographic bureaus. Then there were also some other bureaus that had a lot of class and clout for different reasons. However, the feeling in the Department was that we had to have a Bureau of Consular Affairs.

The rest of the Department surely liked the money that the Bureau of Consular Affairs generated. Sometimes, it was regarded more like a factory, which had interesting quirks in some respects. It was generally expected that every junior officer had to be a consular officer at one time or another, but there was always a kind of mixed bag of perceptions. Occasionally, it had to be the most important bureau in the Department, and everybody had to pay attention to it. I would say that, by and large, that would be the view of it in the Department.

Q: When you began this job, did you have a set of priorities concerning what you considered your greatest problems and where you would concentrate your energies?

TRUITT: The most difficult thing for me was that my staff was in direct, inverse ratio with my view of the problems facing us. To me the largest problems in the Office of Consular Operations activity still involved the visa process, whether non-immigrant or immigrant visa activity. Passport fraud was interesting. If you could get a passport, the entitlement of citizenship was much greater than simply being able to walk into this country.

It was very frustrating to me to realize that we had huge problems in terms of visa fraud. However, the resources had always gone in the direction of supporting passport and entitlements fraud activity. I would say that it took me at least a year and a half to convince 80 percent of the staff that they needed to spend more of their time on the visa side of the fraud problem. This primarily involved people who had been passport oriented. There were a couple of people who, I think, never changed. Maybe they still think that passport fraud is the cornerstone of what they're after.

Also, most of the Foreign Service Officers assigned to the Bureau of Consular Affairs needed to get a better feel for the citizenship side. Much of their consular work abroad had been largely visa directed. I think that they found it more fun to learn more about work involving U.S. citizens.

One of the best things that we did was to hold two conferences very soon after I entered this area. The first conference was held in Rome, and the second conference in Barbados. The second conference was originally scheduled to have been held in Kingston, Jamaica, but a massive hurricane came through the Kingston area about three weeks before this conference was to be held. The Embassy in Barbados was kind enough to host the conference for us.

We went after those regions of the world that had the largest consular and fraud portfolios. We held those two conferences and basically said to the consular people attending them: "What do you want? What can we do for you? How can we do it best?" We also talked about some very substantive issues. We allowed those two conferences to be the mechanisms by which we actually put the Office of Consular Services together and developed our initial ideas of what we could do to help the passport agencies, Foreign Service posts, and our other agency colleagues, including the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] and U.S. Customs.

Q: Let's talk about the passport side. New equipment continues to be developed. I'm talking about copying machines, fancy photo copying, printing presses, and so forth, using electronics. Still talking about passports, did you have a problem keeping up with the new equipment being produced in the commercial market?

TRUITT: No. In all of the work that I did in the Passport Office and specifically in anti-fraud efforts, I saw one mediocre quality counterfeit U.S. passport. In fact, the people in the fraud business picked up on this long before I was involved in it. They clearly felt that the better choice for them was to find a U.S. passport that had already been issued and alter it, rather than to try to replicate a U.S. passport from scratch. There were a lot of good, anti-fraud mechanisms in our passports which were changed regularly. Very good work was done with the U.S. Government Printing Office. So we didn't have very much trouble with the passport book itself.

As a person applies for a U.S. passport in this country, the examining officer looks primarily at the documents submitted. One of them is a certified copy of a birth certificate. The other is a driver's license. We had big problems with counterfeit driver's licenses. We also had problems with driver's licenses that had been issued on the basis of very weak evidence. We didn't know how much we could trust a driver's license, which is, say, two days old. A brand new driver's license was like a red flag to us. So we really concentrated on the documents that we saw. The question was: "How good was the evidence on the basis of which those documents were issued?"

Q: What do you do about a driver's license? Are they issued in every case by the state government, as opposed to a local government?

TRUITT: All driver's licenses are issued by the state, the District of Columbia, or the U.S. Territory concerned.

Q: So here you are, accepting documents issued by the various states and territories. How do you do that? We're talking about at least 54 or 55 issuing entities, I suppose.

TRUITT: We had a variety of different programs. In the Department of Health and Human Services, there is an office that works, virtually exclusively, with the vital statistics registrars of the various states. I worked with that office and also went to the various meetings of the vital statistics registrars of the several states and territories. At these meetings we would talk about centralized registries, the quality of the documents, and how they could contact us and how we could contact them, so that we always had the best communications possible. We spent time with them, discussing how they could improve their local legislation. For example, if somebody presented a fraudulent document, which was probably obtained by fraudulent means, what would be the penalty? What kind of training could we offer to their local, vital statistics people and what could we offer to their people who issued driver's licenses?

We developed a program that we operated not only out of Washington, DC, but also through all of our passport agencies. We would go out from these centers and offer training opportunities to people issuing birth certificates and driver's licenses. This program is still in place today. There is a very active program of training and an exchange of ideas. We also developed a mechanism whereby death records would be entered into our computer data system. This was set up because we had so many problems in the various states with people applying for passports, using death identities.

Q: There is the old story of somebody who walks through a cemetery, looking for somebody who was born about the year in which he or she was born and who died as an infant. So this person probably never had any documentation.

TRUITT: That's right. So we began establishing all of these data banks. Basically, you look at a problem and ask: "What's the best way that we can solve this?" Then we share the information. We did that regularly. I traveled throughout the country, talking to a lot of these different state offices. Other people in my office did the same. We had a lot of input from the people in these state offices. Some of them had marvelous, wonderful ideas, many of which we adopted, to improve the overall integrity of the documents.

The State of California, which was often a leader on so many issues, said: "Okay, we are going to buy what is the basic piece of paper for every birth certificate that we issue in the State of California. We'll make sure, for example, that this a certificate issued by the City and County of San Bernardino. This is what our document will look like. If you see a birth certificate issued after 1987 which is not on this kind of paper, it is not our birth certificate." So we found was that people were thinking through how serious these issues were. Consequently, we knew that we were staving off a lot of fraudulent activity.

However, as another colleague of mine said once: "It's like dealing with a black hole. You know that you've staved off this kind of fraud, but you don't know how much you've staved off." So that was always what we were dealing with, because it takes a lot of time and money to do it. You can always see when you catch one kind of fraud. You don't know how many such cases were stopped and you don't know what your rate of success was. We were very good at this, but everybody was saying that we had to do a better job of it.

Q: Were you working with foreign governments? As you mentioned before, so much passport fraud really involves photo substitution and is usually not designed to assist people to enter the United States. It is often used by people with criminal intent outside the United States.

TRUITT: We did the most serious work, and it was fairly systematic, with the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe had a sub-unit dealing with the movement of persons. It was very concerned about the fraudulent movements of people within Europe and from Europe to other countries. We were invited to be observers at the meetings of this working group. This working group was really pushed by our colleagues from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. They were very interested in how to improve the quality of documents, right across the board. They were very interested in machine readable passports and visas. We were able to make a lot of headway in convincing people, even in our own government, how important it would be to develop a machine readable visa. If you have the kind of machine readable visa that we have now, you can put it into the passport issued by any foreign government, and, in effect, you will have a machine readable passport.

We were very excited about this and worked very closely with our colleagues. They, on the other hand, were also very excited about the machine readable passports that we were issuing and that the Japanese government was also developing. We had a wonderful exchange of views on how to achieve machine readability as fast as possible. We were very successful in those directions. We were also successful in discussing how we could move information such as: "The British passport with this or that number has been altered. This American passport has been altered." We needed to find out how we could get this information to the Council of Europe and have it distributed to everybody concerned. We had a very aggressive program in that regard and worked very closely with our colleagues there.

On a country-by-country basis, we also set up a particular training program for an interested office. We did this for the Chief of Immigration of the Philippines. We also did this for immigration authorities in Australia. We always worked very closely with the Canadian authorities because the border between our two countries is so open. We pride ourselves in feeling that each country has a special obligation to help the other to ensure that its borders were not being used to the detriment of another country. We did all of those things routinely. We hosted a lot of international anti-fraud activity conferences so that we could get the best exchanges of technology and ideas.

Q: Talking about the U.S. machine readable passport, this was Frances Knight's crown jewel. Could the technology involved in developing this machine readable passport also be used by other countries or was it unique in the sense that we could have our own codes and things of this nature? Was this technology something that we could share?

TRUITT: It was an idea that we very much wanted to share. As people enter the U.S., we wanted to be able to machine read his or her passport. For us it was as vital that we issue a machine readable passport to assist our own entries and exits as it was to convince other countries that they should have machine readable passports. Again, this would be of great assistance to us.

I don't think that it is totally accurate to say that the machine readable passport was a crown jewel of Frances Knight's. It was truly Joan Clark who said: "We will have all of our domestic passport agencies issuing machine readable passports" by a given date. She was driven to accomplish that task because it was a slow process.

The Department of State as a whole was not as much interested in this idea as the Bureau of Consular Affairs was. For a long time we had a kind of higgledy-piggledy system. People said: "Oh, don't worry about this 'machine readable' passport. Let's just issue them the old way." It was a nightmare for our immigration inspectors. It was a nightmare for our people at our consular posts. They would ask themselves if they had a good U.S. passport before them or a bad one.

It was truly Joan Clark who was determined that we would have passports that were identical, except for the number. Each passport agency would have a different code in issuing its numbered passports. We would have an overall system, rather than merely a pilot project. This system became a double pilot project because the first batch of machine readable passports was issued under a system which became antiquated very quickly. Then we introduced a second system, so that we had a first and second system, as well as the old system. Then Joan Clark said: "Let's stop this." Then we got it all together.

It's like anything else. There is only so much money and there is only so much interest in a given issue. However, it is interesting now to see that many countries around the world only issue machine readable passports. Many of these countries are very busy, getting the technology from us. A lot of them, in fact, use secure private printers to develop passport books, whereas in fact we only obtain our passports from the GPO [Government Printing Office].

Q: Is it almost a stated, world goal to have passports all using, at least in part, the same system that always can produce the name, date, and place of birth, and that sort of thing? So wherever a person would go, the authorities can whip their passports through a machine and tell who is coming in or going out. Is this something that was being developed during your time in the Bureau of Consular Affairs?

TRUITT: We always thought that it was a good idea. However, truly, what we got was something which was much more in our own national interest. That is, how could we ensure that all passports being used by persons to enter the United States were machine readable? We could do that through the visa process. The one place where you might say that there is a sticking point involved those countries that had the visa waiver system available to them. However, to have a visa waiver, a given country must have machine readable passports. So that's how we handled it. We basically did this in our own national self interest.

I think that that is fair. We shouldn't be shaking our finger at a country and saying: "You need a passport like this." We have our own, special needs, and I think that we took care of them.

Q: As this process developed, did we pick up more cases of passports being improperly used during your time in the Bureau of Consular Affairs? Were there more arrests for such reasons?

TRUITT: The detection rate in connection with passport fraud in particular has remained virtually constant. The absolute numbers have increased because the number of passports issued has increased. I think that there are a couple of reasons for that. I think that most people shy away from trying to obtain a passport fraudulently. I think also that those who know how to do this well, do it so well that they can't be detected.

One of my favorite stories starts when I answered the phone one day. There was a man at the other end of the phone line. He said: "I have a cousin who, five years ago, used my birth certificate and my driver's license to obtain a passport in my name. Now, I want to get a passport for myself." We can't stop that. This cousin looked like him. They were born around the same time. There was no way that anyone was really going to question that that person was anyone but who he claimed to be. You just know that you'll detect what you can best detect. I don't see much there that we could do about it.

It was very frustrating to see that, although the absolute numbers of cases of fraud went up, the prosecutions never went up. There is very little interest in prosecuting passport fraud. You have to have something glitzy and sexy before a U.S. Attorney is interested in prosecuting such a case. He has only limited resources to spend on this whole issue. The idea then got to be to detect such a case, stop it, and make sure that we don't issue such a passport. If nothing else, we know that we don't have a bad passport circulating out there.

Q: With further reference to passports, were there any particular hot spots for such passport fraud, when you looked at your map? Did you have a cluster of pins recording such cases in certain countries or areas during the time that you were doing this work?

TRUITT: The hot spots for passport fraud domestically were Los Angeles, New York, and Miami. All of them involved aliens who were attempting to obtain U.S. passports fraudulently. In most cases they obviously didn't want to go back to where they came from. After those three places, passport fraud occurred pretty evenly throughout the country. However, wherever there was a large, illegal alien population, there was a higher number of such cases. You would also see this in places like the Dominican Republic. There are a lot of people there with valid U.S. citizenship claims. You see cases of families which are the sources of three or four bad cases. You could always tell. The Philippines is another place which is very active in fraudulent claims to U.S. nationality. There are a lot of U.S. servicemen there. There are a lot of claims that, "This is my child." We can say that we don't think so and that we're going to do a test. We can say that, "This is not your child," but those were very difficult cases to handle. Many U.S. servicemen found out for the first time that the infant they held in their arms was not, in fact, one of their children. However, you just knew where those problems were going to come from. We gave special briefings to consular officers assigned to such places. We told them what they needed to do. Most of these claims were basically fraudulent claims to U.S. citizenship.

Other claims were very difficult to root out. Some of them involved narcotics traffickers. We knew that there were people who were fleeing the law. However, it was always more difficult to get to the real issue, to find out where the bottom line was.

Q: I think that we talked about this previously, but did you have any problems on the passport side during this 1986-1989 period with some of our territories, like American Samoa or Guam?

TRUITT: The problems involving American Samoa came up earlier than that. The largest single problem that we had involved Puerto Rico, in terms of sheer numbers. Some 40,000 to 50,000 passports were issued in Puerto Rico each year. The governor of Puerto Rico is a political figure, as the governors of the various states are. Moreover, the Passport Office in Puerto Rico itself is a political body. There is a turnover in personnel in a way that we don't traditionally have. One governor brought in his people, and another governor brought in her people. Therefore, different standards developed of what was acceptable.

We were also very concerned that the quality of those U.S. passport applications was not as good. We also wanted machine readable passports issued everywhere. Puerto Rico was too small a territory to have its own program for the issuance of machine readable passports. That is how we thought of all of those smaller territories. We wanted to bring the passport applications which they received to a place where they could be part of the ordinary work of the day.

This has created some problems, because those passport applications submitted in Puerto Rico have to be transported to Miami, FL (Florida), and then back to Puerto Rico. It has taken a very concentrated effort by the Office of Passport Services to ensure a quick turn around and also a strong commitment that there would always be passport examiners on the staff of the Passport Agency in Miami who were bilingual in Spanish and English, so that they could easily talk with their colleagues in Puerto Rico. That was the most complicated problem to work out. In the case of the Territory of the Virgin Islands, it was very small and just not economically viable in the long run to place machine readable equipment there. Putting aside other concerns, everyone agreed that, for reasons of sound, internal controls, good management, and savings on taxpayer dollars, it was better to bring all passport applications received there to the Passport Agency in Miami. So all of the passport applications received in the Virgin Islands were brought to Miami, but not because somebody was waving a big anti-fraud flag.

Q: Let's turn to the visa side. Was there a difference between immigrant and non-immigrant visa issuance? From your perspective, did this break down into your saying: "We'll do this for immigrant visas and that for non-immigrant visas?" Or did you handle them in much the same way?

TRUITT: The patterns of fraud are radically different. Immigrant visa fraud is heavily tied into issues like marriage fraud and requires a very different type of investigatory process. I think that in the case of immigrant visa fraud we were very good at identifying the patterns that we were seeing, including what people were doing and what nationalities were involved.

In my view non-immigrant visa fraud is so much more fun because it is diversified, it is every day, and it is fast. The consular officer has to make a decision in 30 seconds or so on whether or not to issue a non-immigrant visa. So he or she really has to know the society where he or she is posted. You have to know the make-up of the society, including who travels and who doesn't, why they travel, and where they go. I think that that involved the most interesting kinds of cases, because they were the most engaging. Your mind has to work very quickly.

We identified 20 countries which we believed had the highest fraud rates. They had very high non-immigrant visa refusal rates. Well, these two kinds of activity often go hand in hand. So the challenge to us was to identify what could we do to make the consular officer's work easier and help him or her come to the right decision very quickly.

A lot of this was related to how the consular section was physically set up. That is, how do people get in through the door and how they get out of the door? Can you do a pre-clearance and decide whether you need to see some people at all? Why did we say that we needed to interview some people twice? So, for us it became a very hands on, interactive process, in which interviews were a key element. Understanding the documents presented by the visa applicants was a key element as well. When there is a lot of visa traffic every morning coming through the door of the visa unit, the idea was to find out how to help the interviewers make the right decisions very quickly, so that the rejection rate of visa applications could be held down to an acceptable percentage. The two kinds of fraud involved in the visa process are radically different. You can be very patient in an immigrant visa interview, but this cannot be done in handling a non-immigrant visa interview.

Q: Let's take the more difficult one which is, of course, the non-immigrant visa interview. The interview in the case of an immigrant visa application can be controlled. Appointments for such an interview are made, and this is a whole process. In the case of non-immigrant visa applications, people show up at an embassy or consulate on a given day, and you have to provide them with more or less immediate service.

I can see a couple of developments during this 1986-1990 period. That is, the attempt to bring down the number of people required in our consular operations or anywhere else, plus the fact that efforts needed to be made to find meaningful work for the spouses of Foreign Service personnel. We were also using junior Foreign Service Officers, as has been traditionally done. It takes a while to break them in and so forth. So there is a lot of turmoil in the visa unit, and many people interested in this process. How did you deal with this situation?

TRUITT: During the 1986-1990 period, there was not much use made of dependents of Foreign Service people in the consular process, as there is now. I served in the Bureau of Consular Affairs on three separate occasions. On the third occasion, I'll talk more about the employment of some very talented people as part of the consular process. I saw the up's and down's of that. The employment of such people was not much of an issue at the time. Trying to expand the visa waiver process was well worth the time. When there is a visa waiver program we didn't need to have 20 junior officers in the Embassy in London interviewing British citizens, 99 percent were going to get non-immigrant visas, in any case.

So, once we had a good, visa waiver program established, we would not have to send, say, 15 people to the Embassy in London to do non-immigrant visa work. We would only send, say, five, and send the other 15 people to consular sections in other posts where we really needed them and with some very active interchange. That kind of solution was always very good.

The problem of turnover has always been interesting. I always thought of it as more of a blessing than a curse. In the larger Foreign Service posts some very talented managers basically rotated their junior officers through the consular sections. They started them off doing non-immigrant and immigrant visa interviews, they would handle U.S. citizen service work, and they would handle correspondence. Then they would go through this rotation program again. What this process allowed was to make it possible for these officers very quickly to understand the essence of the community in which they were serving. These officers were very bright, talented, energetic people. We would get first and second tour officers, although some of them might say: "Well, I don't want to do this again." However, they were going to do visa work for the time being. Most of them were very much involved in this process.

Every time I went abroad anywhere, I made a practice of seeking out junior officers and spent, I think, more time with them than with other officers. I would ask them: "What do you need, what don't you know, and what could we do better for you?" I would ask: "What is the most interesting part of your job and what is the most frustrating part of it?" I would find that these officers were basically quite interested in their job. They were really excited when they served under a boss who understood them. The hardest time was when they had a boss who was a little too laid back to pay enough attention to them. A good boss would try to find ways to make the job more interesting. Maybe it would involve a long day's work, but these junior officers would say that it had been a good day.

It didn't matter that some of these junior officers were new to this work. What mattered most was that they were comfortable in speaking the local language. I think that that has always been a real dilemma. We often have to send people abroad who do not speak the local language.

I'm thinking now of my one minute monologue on foreign languages. It never went anywhere. I have always believed that we should recruit people into the Foreign Service who already speak at least one foreign language. It doesn't really matter which foreign language they speak. They shouldn't be accepted into the Foreign Service unless they speak at least one foreign language at the 3-3 level. I don't care whether the foreign language is Spanish or Urdu. A Foreign Service Officer should have a 3-3 level of achievement in some foreign language.

Now if we also had groups of people whom we thought we needed to bring in, and they were really good at a foreign language, we should bring them in for a year in the Civil Service on a one-year appointment at the GS-7 or GS-9 level, I don't care which, and teach them for a year, so that they reached the 3-3 level in a given, foreign language. Everybody who entered the Foreign Service and was assigned to the A-100 [basic officer] class at the Foreign Service Institute [FSI] should have a foreign language under his or her belt. When they completed their training at the FSI, we could send them out. If this were done, I think that we would have a lot less frustration in the system. When I look back to the day I became a Foreign Service Officer, I could also speak two foreign languages.

However, we don't usually do that. We bring in people, some of whom already know a foreign language. In that case, it's just great! I have a friend who came into the Foreign Service who spoke Greek very well. So the Department sent him to Costa Rica! That was a brilliant assignment choice! However, we're quirky, and I understand why that happened, but sometimes that person could go to Greece. We have people coming into the Foreign Service who speak German, and we send them to India. However, at least they will probably use that language some day. But we have people coming into the Foreign Service who only speak English. Then we spend six months training them to speak some foreign language. They are so frustrated when they go overseas that they are not as well prepared as they should be. At any rate, that's my homily on that.

When we have people who speak a foreign language well, who understand the questions, and what the answers will be, for them the interviewing process became a very interactive dialogue bearing on whether to issue or refuse a non-immigrant visa.

Q: You're looking at the big picture, as opposed to the problem facing the chief of the visa unit at an embassy or consulate. However, did you have problems with attitudes? My experience in running consular sections has been that the less prepared people tend to fall back on the rules, become more rigid, and are more likely to say "No" when, in a lot of cases, I think that they should have said "Yes" to visa applicants. They get worried about the responsibility. Often people like this have either been brought in during a special visa program or are sort of dubbed vice consuls because of the needs of the post. Or they are essentially what, in the old days, we called Foreign Service Staff Officers. They worked their way up, they were older, and tended to be quite rigid in their application of the regulations. Was this apparent to you?

TRUITT: I saw various problems at every level. Not everyone is a quick decision-maker. Not everyone is comfortable in making decisions. When I would talk with consular managers at posts overseas, they would often voice frustrations in ways very similar to yours. I don't know how you deal with that problem because you can't tell, when you bring someone into the Foreign Service or when you appoint someone as a consular officer, that their ability to make decisions is not equivalent to their other skills. In fact, I recall earlier this year a piece of litigation going on right now, where an officer was not recommended for tenure in the Foreign Service. What his supervisors said is that he could not make visa decisions quickly. His response was: "I was required to make visa decisions much too quickly. I was told basically that I had to make these decisions as an ill-informed officer."

I don't know. I tended to believe, when I went from Foreign Service post to post, that I was getting a pretty good feel for who was there and what they were saying. However, going back to my experience when I was on the Grievance Staff, I recall that about 20 percent of all of the grievances that I handled involved people who were untenured, junior officers. Most of them were very young. They came into the Foreign Service through the usual examination route. They weren't good decision makers. They just couldn't snap into making decisions. I don't know how you find that out through the kind of testing process that we have. I don't think that you can. You just find that people like this are not really good for consular work. They may be very good for other work in the Foreign Service, but they will never be good consular officers because they can't make decisions quickly. That is one of the essential aspects of being a Foreign Service Officer. That is, you have to make a decision.

Q: Did you also get the feeling that some people seem to have a kind of built in skill for detecting fraud? Ernest Hemingway used to say that the greatest ability that an author had to have was a kind of bullshit detector, which is exactly the same thing that a consular officer needs. I mean that when he feels the bells go off, something is wrong. Did you find that this was the case?

TRUITT: Oh, yes. You could give some people 15 visa applications, and they would go, say, to number 12 and say: "This is the fraudulent case." Other people would say: "How did you do that?" Their instincts were so finely honed that they knew that this case did not sound right.

I always had a handful of officers who were much more savvy than I was in detecting fraud. Their instincts were just different. We also had some officers who could not see a case of fraud if the person involved wore a sign saying: "I am a fraud."

There are great stories of people whose instincts were right there and people who did not have such instincts. There were frustrations on both sides. I remember being told the story of a supervisory consular officer who said: "We're so busy that we don't have time to stop for fraud. Issue the visas. I don't want to see a fraud case." And there are other supervisory consular officers who say: "I can't believe that we didn't see a case of fraud today." So the evidence goes all over the place.

I always admired the people who had the instincts for saying: "This is a case of fraud. I know it is. I can't find where the fraud is, but I know it's there." They were right, even though I, myself, would have issued the visa.

Q: This is a sexist remark, but did you find whether women or men were better as consular officers? My only feeling is that there have been all sorts of studies by medical professionals, concluding that women tend to pick up more clues to fraud than men. The normal instincts of women are more sensitive to signs of fraud given off by people. I was wondering whether you detected this tendency? I have to say that I never did.

TRUITT: Of the two people who now come to mind as the very best consular officers that I knew, one was a man and one was a woman. However, I never thought of the problem that way, so I just don't have any view.

Q: I don't, either. It was just a question that came to me. I was in the consular business for a long time. I don't know. [Laughter] Anyhow, we'll leave that question to be answered another time.

When you're dealing with fraud, what we're talking about is the whole visa operation. Fraud is just part of the process. In fact, in a way, fraud is the driving force behind the machinery, or we wouldn't have all of these procedures. Fraud is not the only consideration. Some people are just not eligible to obtain a visa. Such cases do not involve fraud. Did you find any problems with the fact that you were dealing with part of the essence of the visa process and you were in a small office, off to one side? How did that work, in your view?

TRUITT: What became clear very quickly was that, although Assistant Secretary Joan Clark was very happy to have a centralized, anti-fraud activity, there was resentment about this everywhere. People in many consular sections believed that some of their responsibilities had been taken away or that one post had more responsibilities than another post. They tended to feel that their jobs were less interesting than jobs at other posts. They felt that the Bureau of Consular Affairs was too pushy or that we weren't pushy enough and didn't understand the real world. All of those feelings would tend to disappear whenever I attended a consular conference. At this point they couldn't come to me fast enough and explain quickly enough that they had something to add. They seemed to feel that maybe there should be somebody at the conference from the Visa and Passport Offices and Overseas Citizen Services.

This was, indeed, one of the most entertaining parts of the business - that is, to be hated one day and courted the next. I just smiled, because basically I worked for the principal DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] and the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs.

We have to work on this problem together. For example, this is my part of the job, and that is your part of the job. I don't want to do your job but I have to do mine. The nastiest note I ever received from a colleague when I was involved in anti-fraud work was a rude message from another senior officer that I didn't understand my work and that I needed to get my act together. I took this note to my boss. I said: "We have two choices here. Either you get this person to act like an officer and a gentleman or I will leave this office. I don't care. I won't have any difficulty in getting another job but I will not stand being abused by a colleague." I showed my boss the note. He was stunned when he read it. He said: "Well, I know that this person is not feeling well. However, you don't have to take anything like that." I said: "Well, either we straighten this out or I'll just find another job." It was straightened out, and nothing like that ever happened again.

By the second year in the anti-fraud office the situation was much better. By the third year it was working well because people regarded it as normal to have an anti-fraud office. However, during the first two years, I spent a huge amount of time convincing people that the anti-fraud office was part of the organization.

Q: I'm surprised at what you say, at least as far as our posts in the field are concerned. Was this more of a problem in the Department of State in Washington? In the field, fraud is always a major concern of ours. We know that there are some very clever people who are heavily overworked. So any advice that we get is really welcome. We tend to think that the people know what they're doing.

TRUITT: One of the nice things about being at a Foreign Service post is that whenever you can give them information that is current or pithy, they're delighted to receive it because our posts are still rather isolated. At a post, say, such as the embassy in Athens, you wonder what is happening in the embassy in Ankara. You think that you don't have time to look into it, but it's nice that somebody was nice enough to tell us about what was happening in our part of the world. I think that Foreign Service posts are always hungry for knowledge and for an exchange of ideas.

People in the field feel: Come and see us and let's talk about this or that. People assigned to the Department in Washington always have a different mind set. I've always believed that the people in Washington are extremely territorial, wherever they are assigned. It is much harder for them to adjust. I've been through so many reorganizations, not only in the Bureau of Consular Affairs but in other places in the Department. Most people don't take to reorganizations. They don't regard them as an adventure. They are afraid that they may come out on the short end of the stick here. They tend to think: "This is 'my portfolio.'" I think that that is what was happening. Foreign Service posts were saying: "Okay. We're willing to give this reorganization a try. This is good." People in Washington tended to say: "You took part of my employee group away. I don't like this." It takes a couple of years for people to realize that this is how CA [Bureau of Consular Affairs] does its business. We have new deputy assistant secretaries and new office directors coming in. They see what the playing field looks like and accept it as normal. When you change the playing field in the middle of someone's tour of duty or job in the Department, they don't regard this change as normal.

Q: Do you think that part of the problem was that you were in the Civil Service, or that the lines between the Civil Service and the Foreign Service were frequently blurred in Washington?

TRUITT: I don't think that my being in the Civil Service had much to do with the problems I mentioned. The way that Assistant Secretary Joan Clark put it, she wanted continuity from the Civil Service side. We also wanted to ensure that we had senior officer representation from the Foreign Service side. So the principal Deputy Assistant Secretary position was always to be filled by a Foreign Service Officer. Even so, I'm the only Civil Service person who's ever served in the job I had at this time. It's been held by a Foreign Service Officer ever since I left.

Also, I had a reputation in the community. There was a number of Foreign Service Officers who would say to me with great surprise: "Oh, I didn't know that you weren't a Foreign Service Officer." This used to be a very entertaining thought. In fact, I knew the consular business as well as they did. I probably knew parts of it better than most of those people because I had had the pleasure of working in Barbara Watson's front office [when she was Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs]. I had been well trained on the visa side, I knew the passport side, and I had worked on overseas citizen services as well. No one ever commented that I was a Civil Service person. That was never the issue.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs was such a mixed bag of people. When I sent people out to do a specific job, I would always send out a Foreign Service Officer with a Civil Service officer. The teams were always mixed after everybody got there, whether I was handling a stateside or an overseas job. I never got caught in that kind of dialogue. Nobody said: "You can't know enough about this matter because you are either a Foreign Service or a Civil Service officer." The problem was that some people didn't like the fact that the portfolios had shifted in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Q: I am thinking particularly of Africa when I say that there is a multitude of countries, often with one officer, at most, doing consular work in each post. Often he or she does consular work in addition to other things. Often, they are junior officers. They are really in isolated places. Talk about being out in the middle of nowhere! I would have thought that, although they don't have a mass of work to do, one of the nice things about having a lot of work to do is that pretty soon you pick up patterns and trends. However, if you handle, say, 20 U.S. passports a year, you're not going to be able to tell which is a right and which is a wrong case. Did you deal with African or similar posts differently?

TRUITT: We used to refer to them as the officers in splendid isolation. We handled this situation in two ways. In Africa we had the most vigorous, regional consular officer program in the world. These R\regional consular officers lived in Johannesburg, [South Africa]; Lagos, [Nigeria]; and, I believe, in Abidjan, [Ivory Coast]. These posts had regional consular functions. We made this arrangement so that we would have senior consular officers who could, in fact, be a source of advice for an individual consular officer.

In the Bureau of Consular Affairs we also developed a training program for those people who, we knew, were going out as the only consular officers at these posts. The Bureau of Consular Affairs and the FSI worked on this training program very closely because we knew that these assignments involved a very different mind set, that the tolerances would be different, that the unusual circumstances in these assignments could not be distinguished from what someone else would regard as routine. In fact, at some of these posts in Africa the consular function only took up two hours a day. It was not a full-time job.

So we concentrated on how we could give the person instant access to advice At some posts we said: "This is the person responsible for giving you consular guidance." In many ways, that made the situation more difficult. You just don't generally find a great interest on the part of an economic officer in providing guidance for the consular function.

We tried to use this as a tool. However, we made a variety of efforts to ensure that there would be a better program of guidance for these part time Consular Officers. We also conducted some special training programs because we knew that they didn't have a lot of training. What they had would be pretty critical.

Q: Turning to the immigrant visa side, our policy has been, almost since the inception of the issuance of immigrant visas, a two key approach. One key is turned by the consular officer, and the other key is turned by an immigration officer. Obviously, the problem of fraud is the responsibility of both the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Consular Service. Can you talk about the relationship between the two entities?

TRUITT: The relationship between these two entities 10 years ago was very different from what it is today. I think that the mass communications system has really helped the communications effort. On the immigrant visa side, there is often a petition, which is approved here in the U.S. by a Regional Immigration and Naturalization Service Center. These petitions then go back out to the post, where the applicants will be interviewed. Where a consular officer sees a problem, the officers refer the cases back to the Regional INS Service Centers for a second review.

Why do things go tragically wrong with that process? Files get lost or people at the INS Service Centers say: "We got it right the first time. Stop bothering us." Sometimes there is intense pressure from a Member of Congress or a Senator, who says: "Why aren't you taking action on this case?" There can be rank intransigence on both sides. It's a very difficult process, because officers at a post see facts differently from somebody who is analyzing a portfolio in Burlington, VT (Vermont) [Immigration and Naturalization Service file center]. So this system does not always work as well as it might.

Two developments helped us to deal with that problem as well. There are now a lot more INS officers at individual posts. When the relationship between INS and consular officers is well balanced and well understood, there are good communications between INS and the consular section of the post. Also, I think that there has been much better integration because of the Regional INS Center which was located in Portsmouth, NH (New Hampshire), where all immigrant petitions are filed after they are approved and from which all petitions are sent out to the consular posts. Because there are Foreign Service Officers assigned to the Regional INS Center at Portsmouth, NH, they can have a very good effect on how those petitions move back and forth between the Center and consular posts overseas.

Like anything else, once you meet somebody, once you know them, once you interact with them, the dialogue is much easier. Say that you are the INS officer and I am a Consular Officer. The first time we go through this process, there may be problems. However, we realize that it's been good. The second time it's pretty good, and the process improves every time. We've just done a much better job in developing relationships so that people trust what the other is saying, and contacts are much better.

Q: What were the major problems in connection with immigrant visa fraud during your time in Consular Affairs?

TRUITT: I think that family relationship fraud was the biggest issue. For example, was this a valid marriage? Is this really your child? Time and time again, those issues came up. Is this really an unmarried son? Our records show that he was married two years ago. In my view, all of those issues were the most difficult to handle on the immigrant visa side. The problem was that there were cases of rank substitution of persons for someone else. Molly X is the beneficiary of the petition, but the applicant is named Polly. How did that happen? These are all examples of potential relationship fraud.

That, of course, makes perfect sense because most immigrant visas are tied into mother-father, sister-brother, parent-child relationships. Establishing whether the alleged relationship is valid and whether the marriage is valid are the key points. Some of the cases we had were absolutely classic. We used to feature them in material we sent out to the posts. We would say: "This wedding dress was used five times in cases connected with this post. If this wedding dress is used again, do not assume that this is a valid marriage." In fact, this was a racket, but it was fun. We had one case involving a whole family sitting for a photo. The problem was that some of the people had no legs! In fact, this was a photo which had been pieced together. One person had a head but, if you looked down, the person had no legs. Those were the kinds of things that were fun. However, they all involved relationship fraud.

Q: Did you find any centers or hotbeds of immigrant visa problems?

TRUITT: Always very interesting were cases from the Dominican Republic. Pakistan became much more interesting over time. The Philippines were always very interesting, as was Colombia. Mexico was obviously very interesting. About three percent of all consular work is generated out of posts coming under the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs [ARA]. There are a lot of high-fraud profile posts there. You spend a lot of time dealing with the very large posts in the ARA area.

Q: Did you find that in your office you developed experts on Latin American or marriage fraud or something like that? Did you break down your organization in that way?

TRUITT: Our officers in the Bureau of Consular Affairs had regional responsibilities. Basically, each officer assigned had at least one country and sometimes a part of the world, a passport agency or two, as well as, perhaps, one other Washington agency as a liaison officer. People assigned to Consular Affairs were responsible for understanding, for example, the kind of fraud coming out of the Arabian Peninsula or Southeast Asia. It was their job to track it and to follow it. They wrote reports on it. They were the prime contacts on any anti-fraud effort in that part of the world. That matched what was happening elsewhere in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. In the Office of Overseas Citizen Services people were regionally oriented, as was the case in the Visa Office. That made for nice pockets of activity. And those people would meet periodically and say to each other: "What about this and what about that?" So they all had regional responsibilities.

Q: I would have thought that two areas where we would be extremely sensitive to allegations of fraud would be the use of fraud for drug smuggling. The other would be the use of fraud to facilitate the movement of terrorists to the United States. Was terrorism a major question for you at that time in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, or did that come later?

TRUITT: Let me start with the narcotics issue. The narcotics issue was always a major matter, which is why we were very highly interested in activities in Colombia and also in Mexico.

The anti-terrorist portfolio was always a matter of major interest. However, you did not necessarily know how it was going to play out, because the mind of the terrorist is unique. In connection with one case I had, which wound up in court, the person accused was brought back to the United States for prosecution. This involved a Palestinian man. About 15 years before he came to my attention, he was the beneficiary of an immigrant petition to allow him to come to this country. The petition involved a matter of fraudulent identity. In fact, he came to the U.S. and lived very quietly under that fraudulent name for years. Then he began his terrorist activities.

It is pretty hard to know, when somebody is 19 years old, that he will develop into a terrorist at age 33. We knew that. We also knew that in certain parts of the world we had a real obligation. We handled cases like that very differently, because we had very good information coming in from the intelligence community. How could we take the lookout system to ensure that we would pick up the name of someone who was a suspected or known terrorist?

There are stories that you can spell the name Qadhafi [the leader of Libya] 50 different ways. That may be right. How do you develop a system sophisticated enough so that you can pick out who is Qadhafi? How do you look at a system when you know that there are only five patronymic names in the whole country? How can you begin to work out where the terrorist is in a country where everyone looks incredibly alike to you, at first blush?

We spent a lot of time collecting data from the intelligence community, putting it into our data banks, and then working on lookout systems linguistically sophisticated enough so that we could differentiate between people and pick up somebody as a possible terrorist. This was primarily needed in those areas of the world where we saw a strong terrorist problem.

Now, at the time, working against this effort was the fact that a lot of our Foreign Service posts did not have any capability to be on line with us in terms of communications and to have access to the central data bank. We still had posts whose whole system for checking names was in a book, and not from a computerized data base. For us this was a great source of frustration. Some visa applicants would escape our checking system regularly. The only time that we would get any attention was if something went tragically wrong. Occasionally, a case like that would come up, at which point we would be asked: "Why haven't you been doing more, Michelle?" I would reply: "Let me show you what I did last year and what I'm trying to do here. Remember, you've already told me that we don't have the funds to do more." In the anti-terrorism arena, you kind of get blitzed with activity when something goes wrong. However, you couldn't convince people that, technologically, we needed to be much more aggressive, unless there was some kind of urgent and compelling case.

Q: Did you find that you were beginning to develop this system just at a time when computer technology and the means of transmitting data were improving to such a point that you could really start to do something? What about the technology available during this 1986 to 1990 period? What technology was developed during this period?

TRUITT: There were so many problems with technology issues, and they were all over the building. There was no overall, overarching direction. Really, the best help we got was what we developed ourselves, because of pushing for the machine readable visa and passport. The Bureau of Consular Affairs was always pushing the envelope with the individual posts and what is now the Office of Information Management. We would try almost anything that we could to convince individuals elsewhere in the Department that we needed to be on line with our overseas posts, at least in the morning. We could share these facilities in the afternoon with other sections of our posts abroad. We hoped that we could at least get the work done effectively and well and out of the way in the morning, because that's when most visa applicants came into our posts overseas.

However, and perhaps even now, the Department is still struggling for funds to develop an overall way to do its business. We perform our functions in a very erratic way. We just had to work around it because, again, the Bureau of Consular Affairs is not considered a leading bureau in the Department. It's considered a bureau that just needs to get its work done. So whenever we got another Foreign Service post on line, we cheered. Whenever a post like Seoul, for example, went down, we cried, and that would happen often. So it was just an erratic way to do business. There's nothing worse than a Foreign Service post being down for a day. It's even more tragic when you find out that it's been down for more than a month. The post thought that the system would be fixed and didn't even bother to tell us. All of those issues used to come dancing across our screen.

We had some nasty cases develop that way, including the case which came up later of the blind Sheikh, which I saw play out from afar, after I left this job. In fact, his visa was issued before his name was checked, and people at our post abroad may not have treated this case with all of the care which they should have displayed. We took a lot of nasty criticism over this case.

Q: He was the leader of a group of Islamic terrorists. He came out of Sudan, if I remember correctly. He was considered responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York in 1991, 1992, or 1993.

TRUITT: Somewhere during that period. He applied for a visa in Sudan. The Embassy in Khartoum checked his name, working from a lookout book. It had no automated system. There was concern that not all of the checks and balances had been implemented before the visa was issued. However, the Embassy in Khartoum was not scheduled to be as highly automated as a lot of other posts, because it was small. However, as you've pointed out, in Sudan there was a much higher terrorism perspective.

Q: Was malfeasance a problem? How did you deal with malfeasance?

TRUITT: Malfeasance was always treated on a very close hold basis. In fact, I myself handled all of the malfeasance cases for the office. I dealt directly with my supervisors in the Bureau of Consular Affairs on the issues involved, because these were highly sensitive. I had a wonderful working relationship with my colleagues in DS [Bureau of Diplomatic Security].

Q: DS stands for?

TRUITT: The Bureau of Diplomatic Security. The degree of trust was virtually absolute between our offices. That is a critical element when you're dealing with malfeasance.

I had one significant malfeasance case. It tickles me when I think about it now, because of the way it developed. We thought that we were having problems with bad visas issued in Madrid. We couldn't tell if they were artfully prepared outside of the Embassy in Madrid or whether it was a matter of malfeasance. However, they all seemed to involve Iranians. During the period from 1986-1990, that was a hot button issue.

Other things also happen in government. However, I got this phone call one day, saying: "I'm shutting down, Michelle. The government's run out of money. We've decided that no one in the anti-fraud area is essential to the operations of the U.S. Government. So you and everyone else are to go home." I said: "Wait a minute. You know, sometimes we have serious work that we do here." The answer was: "Nope. You're not essential. Go home." So I sent everyone home except one of my division chiefs who said: "No, I can't do that." I said: "I'm going to stay here, too. I just can't abandon the office." For this, he had the reward of getting an assistant U.S. Attorney hot on one of our cases, which was nice.

However, I got the case of the year. I received a call from Miami International Airport from a man with whom I had done a training course. He said: "Michelle, I have a man here. I don't believe that he has a valid visa. It appears to have been issued in Madrid." I said: "Hold him." I immediately called my colleagues in DS who, of course, were critical of me. I said: "We may have either a good lead here on a wonderful counterfeit visa or we may, in fact, be playing into these allegations of malfeasance that we have been hearing about Madrid."

DS immediately contacted Miami. They questioned this man. In fact, he admitted that he had obtained the visa through malfeasance. He had bought it from one of our consular officers in the Embassy in Madrid. This Iranian came from a very wealthy family. He was very upset that he was caught and when they went to court he literally threw up in the judge's chambers. He was just beside himself.

He was our lead into what had been a history of malfeasance in the Embassy in Madrid. In fact, our instincts were right. They were valid visas and they were being issued for money by the anti-fraud officer in the Embassy in Madrid!

Q: My God!

TRUITT: Right. In fact, the case led to this officer's indictment, subsequent prosecution, and severance from the Foreign Service. I'm not saying anything that is improper or that I couldn't tell in the public area. In fact, I can remember the day when this officer was arrested in the State Department and taken away in handcuffs by our Diplomatic Security officers.

Later on, at a meeting, I said: "I hope that the next time that we re-think, when we have to draw down radically, we need to have somebody in the Anti-Fraud Office." The person who had told me to go home said: "Oh, that will never happen again." I said: "That is not the issue." I was absolutely dumbstruck at this comment. When people take a position, they generally don't move from it. I am sure that if we had shut down the office, as we were directed to do, that case of malfeasance might have gone unnoticed.

Q: I realize that this was a specific case and that the person involved was convicted. But just to get a feel for it, had this practice been going on for some time, not only in Madrid but elsewhere? Or was this, as far as you were concerned, a single case that you got?

TRUITT: We would have maybe a couple of dozen allegations of malfeasance every year. Of those, perhaps one every year was true. We had a couple of allegations of malfeasance in the passport agencies at the same time. We had a passport examiner who was, in fact, selling U.S. passports, bringing in the applications herself, processing them, and sending them out. She was collecting money for them. So this is the kind of thing that you must be ever vigilant about and think about your internal controls. A lot of people, though, were the subjects of allegations because people didn't get the passport or visa that they wanted. We had a very vigorous malfeasance program.

There are always people that are tempted. The amount of money that can be made by such activity is pretty staggering, if you decide to be a corrupt official. A good U.S. passport sold abroad and altered will easily bring in anywhere between $5,000 and $10,000. Can you imagine what the price would be for a U.S. passport that has not been altered? People will pay $1,000 for a visa. A valid visa is worth a whole lot more than that. You start to see people that lose their perspective. Whenever such a case comes up, we sort of bled for the organization because we treasured the integrity of our colleagues. But then you just have to go at it every once in a while.

Q: You had spot places like the Dominican Republic, where there were cases of fraud. I was Consul General in Seoul [Republic of Korea] back in the 1970s. I once asked for a special investigation, really on the basis of nothing much, outside of the fact that I knew that almost everybody in South Korea wanted a U.S. visa. Our security officer there was a bit lackadaisical about it. I asked Barbara Watson [then Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs] to help me. She responded beautifully. We got a new security officer and we uncovered a lot of fraud. At the same time that we uncovered a lot of fraud, I realized that a whole new ring was developing, which was picked up later.

The point is that if you're in an area, where you know that everything is available, including money, sex, blackmail, and whatever you wanted, were you able to respond by sending out teams, instructions, guidance, or anything of that nature?

TRUITT: We spent some time, probably not enough, but some time identifying what a good, internal audit is, especially affecting the Foreign Service National [FSN] staff [locally hired people, usually citizens of the country concerned]. This was especially the case in countries where a lot of our own consular officers did not speak the local language. Seoul was a prime example of this. I know of two occasions where we literally fired FSN's, because we believed that they were involved in malfeasance. The same thing occurred in Bangkok [Thailand]. Again, Thai is not a language that most people in the Foreign Service study. In fact, Foreign Service Nationals get very skilled in understanding the system, and some of them see the money to be made by being corrupt.

We would say to our consular officers, as managers: "You're responsible for a spot audit. You're responsible, every three months, to audit this and audit that. If you don't do that, and later on it is clear that there is malfeasance by your subordinates, you are also responsible because you are not auditing your staff." We would try to do a good job in preparing our Diplomatic Security colleagues going out on trips overseas. We would say: "Please talk with the consular officer because they have all of these interests." We would say to people: "Every once in a while you have to 'stop the music.' You have to go in and account for the cash. You have to review how the lookout process is being handled. You have to account for how the visa foils are being accounted for. You have to make sure that you can account for the passports we sent you. If you don't do that, you're not doing your job and you're allowing Foreign Service Nationals to take over doing the job."

However, time after time, malfeasance would occur in places where, I think, language skills were not as good as they should have been. In places where that language is only spoken in that country and is not easily transferable in terms of a Foreign Service Officer's career, we're not going to invest huge amounts of time and make sure that an officer is really fluent in that language.

Q: And if you do provide such training to a Foreign Service Officer, they almost invariably wind up, after a very short time, in the political section.

TRUITT: Right, because they can talk to officials.

Q: Well, is there anything else that we should cover concerning this 1986-1990 period?

TRUITT: I would like to stop at this point because I need to explain the 1990 period, then leaving this job and going off to my next assignment. Basically, I think that that is the essence of what the anti-fraud role was all about.

Q: Today is January 14, 1998. Michelle, we are in 1990, and what's up with your career?

TRUITT: We had an election in 1988 and a change of administration. As part of that, we got a new Under Secretary for Management, Ivan Seelye, and for us a new Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, following the departure and retirement of Joan Clark. We got a political appointee from the State of New Hampshire, Elizabeth Tamposi, known to everyone as Betty. Betty had been a close associate of John Sununu [Chief of Staff at the White House]. In fact, she was also on very close terms with President George H.W. Bush. Betty's father had been a major contributor to Bush's campaign in New Hampshire. That was the first presidential primary Bush won [in 1988]. So there were a lot of affiliations there. In any new administration, you will see a lot of political appointees. She had the logical connections and initially became Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations.

Q: We were talking about the situation in 1990. President Bush entered office in 1989.

TRUITT: That's right. However, Joan Clark stayed on for the time being and into the new administration as Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. Betty Tamposi arrived in the Bureau of Consular Affairs, serving initially on Joan Clark's staff. She was there with us but, in fact, did not become Assistant Secretary of State until the latter part of 1989. So she served in that capacity from 1989 until 1990. I was still handling the fraud prevention job pending the switch from Joan Clark to Betty Tamposi.

Q: As this interview will develop, Ms. Tamposi became quite a controversial person. While she was sort of reading her way into the job of Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs and getting accustomed to this job, did you get any impression of how she responded to these new duties? The U.S. Government is a big bureaucracy. Some people take to it and understand it. Others don't. What was your impression of Ms. Tamposi at the very beginning of her career in the Department of State?

TRUITT: I had very mixed impressions. We used to have a morning staff meeting. It turned out that she sat next to me at Assistant Secretary Joan Clark's staff meetings. As you know, people in the Department often talk in acronyms to refer to various offices in the building. I spent a lot of my time, writing out for her what the acronyms meant and what we were talking about, since we tended to abbreviate everything. Other than that, I did not see her very often. She was much more involved with the Deputy Assistant Secretaries and with Assistant Secretary Joan Clark. From my perspective at that time, I did not know what her directions were or much else. I had been told that she had worked in many jobs in the administration. This was a job that she wanted. I was also told by rumor, rather than knowledge, that she was not the first choice of Ivan Seelye, the Under Secretary for Management, but that he had been told directly by the White House that she was to be the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. She eventually took this job.

She became the Assistant Secretary. I remember her swearing in because the Diplomatic Reception Room on the Eighth Floor of the Department, where the oath of office was administered to her, was completely packed, chock-a-block. It was the first time that I had been to a swearing-in ceremony that was videotaped. The entire proceedings were recorded on video. She gave a speech which, I think, was full of life. It would have been a good speech if she had been involved in a political campaign.

I wasn't surprised at this, because Betty had been a state senator in New Hampshire. She had run, unsuccessfully, in a primary election for the Republican nomination to a seat in the House of Representatives in Washington. I knew that she was very political in what she did. So I wasn't surprised at the political tone on the one hand. However, I was somewhat surprised on the other hand that, in view of the number of swearing-in ceremonies that I had previously attended, this was the first time that I witnessed this kind of performance. But I didn't worry about it, one way or the other.

As it quickly developed, however, there was a real push by Ivan Seelye to become involved in issues involving consular and anti-fraud efforts. Anti-fraud sounds as if it's really fun and full of interesting stories to tell. Anti-fraud matters are not like a lot of other criminal activities, which tend to be pretty boring. A senior officer in the Department has a lot to do, and you don't necessarily catch some big fish at the end of the day.

We spent exorbitant amounts of time putting together all kinds of briefing papers for Ms Tamposi. These ultimately became briefing books or briefing appendages, dealing with all sorts of issues related to fraud. So I spent a lot of time with her on anti-fraud activities and traveling with her. She attended many conferences, many of which I also attended.

Q: How did she seem to be taking to this process?

TRUITT: I thought that she was taking to it fairly well, but there was a lot of pressure from the M front office [Office of the Under Secretary for Management]. At about this time she learned that she was pregnant with her third child. In fact, the child was due in January or February 1990. So by June, 1989, when I first saw her, she was already pregnant with this third child. She was going back and forth to New Hampshire virtually every weekend, as I understood it, and was keeping incredibly long hours. I can remember being in a meeting with her one evening until 10:30 PM, along with five or six other senior officers from the Bureau of Consular Affairs. So she was intent on taking this job and making herself known. I think that she had a lot on her mind.

Q: Oh, yes! How did you see her working within the Bureau of Consular Affairs over a period of time?

TRUITT: Usually, I sat back and watched her performance. She made some staffing changes which, I thought, were interesting because she didn't know any of us. We had a principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State who left his job very shortly after she became Assistant Secretary. We then got a new principal DAS who, very shortly thereafter, also left his job. We had a director of the Overseas Business Services Emergency Sector, who also left very quickly. Betty also had a special assistant who left very quickly. We also had a quick turnover in the secretarial staff. I thought: "Wait a minute. It's not for me to pass judgment on these changes." I've always thought that if it's your show to run, you should run it. Other people might not like it, but it's not for them to comment on it.

There always is a certain tension in the Department with someone who is a political appointee. On the part of the permanent staff, the view is often expressed: "How can they dare to do much of anything?" At the time, elsewhere in the Department, there was another Assistant Secretary of State, a career officer. He was moved out of this position within a month, and nobody said a word.

Q: Who was this?

TRUITT: I can't remember his name at the moment, but he was the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. He later went on to be Ambassador to Finland.

Q: Oh, we're talking about John Kelly.

TRUITT: Yes, John Kelly. Kelly came into office and changed his whole staff, and that was his prerogative. But Betty Tamposi had all of the best people around her and still changed them. However, as it turned out, I was one of about 20 people who got cross-wise with Betty about tenure. I used to keep count of the number of changes in senior officers in Consular Affairs but stopped when there had been five changes.

She called me into her office one day and said that she could no longer trust me and that I had lied to her. I said: "Excuse me?" She said: "I told you that we were working on anti-fraud and certainly on terrorist activities. I asked you to go to a very senior officer in another bureau to set up a number of meetings. You told me that you had taken care of all of that." I said: "Well, I did." She said: "I called that senior officer, and he said that he had never met you." Well, in fact what happened was that I had called him on the telephone. He said that the people I was planning to call to attend these meetings were not the right people to call. He said: "I'll make a list of the right people, you call them, and we'll set up a further meeting." I had never said to Ms Tamposi that it shouldn't be this person but that one. She never asked this senior officer what happened. She only got as far as learning that he had never met me personally. So I called him and told him what had happened. He said: "Shall I call her and straighten this out with her?" I said: "No, I don't think that she's the kind of person with whom you can ever straighten out anything, once she has decided to put you on her black list." So that is the sort of thing that I had been seeing.

Lo and behold, as it all played out, she became very ill with flu or something like that and went to one of the local hospitals in Washington. The doctors decided that they had to deliver her baby, so while she was sick in the hospital, the baby was born. She then went to New Hampshire to recover. During that recovery period, the director came to see me one day and said: "Betty will be back in the office in April, 1990, and she wants you out of this job before she comes back. She does not want to see you again." I looked him dead in the eye and I said: "Thank you very much. I'm delighted." He said: "What?" I said: "I'm delighted to go. I have turned down two offers of jobs that I really wanted because she asked me specifically to stay on. I regret that I turned them down but I don't regret leaving this job. I just want my reputation to be intact, thank you very much, and I'll just get another job."

In fact, the then Inspector General, knowing what was going on, because it was pretty public knowledge what Betty Tamposi was doing in CA, arranged a one-year assignment for me in the Office of the Inspector General. I received some kind of special status in the Inspector General's office, which some other people queried, because, although I was not an Assistant Inspector General, I attended his staff meetings every morning. He looked pointedly at me and said that this was an opportunity to have a training assignment. So off I went to the Office of the Inspector General for what I thought was going to be one year.

At about the same time I was in the Credit Union one day. I ran into a friend of mine who was then Charge d'Affaires in Barbados. He had been very kind to me because we had dropped a conference on him very quickly one year because a terrible hurricane had made it impossible for the embassy in Jamaica to host it, as we had originally planned. We gave him a couple of weeks' notice. He said: "I'm going to be the Executive Director in ARA [Bureau of American Republics Affairs]. I said that I was very happy for him. I knew that his deputy had another year to go in his job. I thought that when he was in that job, I would go to see him, because I had always wanted to be an administrative officer in a regional bureau. I went off and pursued my job search.

I was really fortunate because I got to do an inspection in mid-career. That was very good, because in the case of most of the inspections done here in Washington, people are not traveling, because they are out of school. I was talking to a friend of mine, who said: "By the way, the position of Deputy Executive Director of ARA is coming open." I said: "What?" I said that I wanted that job and was just waiting for it to come open the following summer, when I finished the detail to the Office of the Inspector General. He said: "Well, why don't you just call and let John Clark, the Executive Director of ARA, and let him know that you are available." I said: "No, I couldn't do that." So he said: "I'll dial the phone." [Laughter]

So I called John Clark and said that I really wanted this job but that I was waiting for him to come back from Barbados and discuss it with him personally. He said: "I'd love for you to have the job. We'll work it out." I told him: "You know, I am Civil Service, and this kind of job has never gone to a Civil Service Officer. People in the Foreign Service will not be ecstatic over that. However, I know some parts of that business very well." So he said: "Fine." So we left it at that.

I went off to do an inspection during the summer. This turned out to be a marvelous inspection because the Inspection Team was headed by Clint Lauderdale, one of my former bosses in the Bureau of Personnel, and by Perry Shankle. I had never known Perry Shankle before, but he was a person whom everyone talked about. Nobody ever talked about him negatively. By this time he had already been President of AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] and had left that job. He had served in ARA at different times. He had a wonderful reputation, not only of being a really smart guy but a real people person. He and I ran this inspection team together. I learned a lot from him. We did this inspection during the summer of 1990.

Q: What were you inspecting?

TRUITT: We were inspecting a bureau that is no longer in existence, called CIP. This was a bureau set up especially by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives dealing with telecommunications. It had fewer than 40 people assigned to it. We amalgamated CIP into the Bureau of Economics and Business Affairs, but it had been a separate institution prior to that.

CIP did a lot of high-profile work with big companies like Motorola. It also had a lot of dealings with the Department of Commerce and the ITU [International Telecommunications Union], so that it had a lot of overlays with the public and international enterprise community. A lot of high-profile work had been done there, and it was a very interesting bureau to look at. I was then scheduled to do an inspection in Jamaica, Belize, and the Bahamas in the fall of 1990. However, I never got there because Ivan Seelye had set up a program which helped me get the job in ARA. It was a kind of exchange program. If you were a senior officer, and there were jobs available in Washington, it didn't matter whether you were a Foreign Service or Civil Service officer, you could get the job. This program made it very easy for me to get the job. So in September 1990, I went to the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, or ARA, as Deputy Executive Director. I was there for the next few years.

Q: Before we do that, I would like to go back to your time in Consular Affairs when Betty Tamposi was Assistant Secretary. As it became clear that there was a real disconnect between Ms. Tamposi and most of her staff, as shown by the way she related to you and to others.

TRUITT: There were as many people who benefited from the turmoil in CA as people who felt that their careers had taken a serious and negative turn. So there were people who worked very well with Betty Tamposi and saw their careers actually boosted by the experience. They got some high-profile jobs that they might not otherwise have gotten at that moment in time.

As far as the work being done was concerned, visas were issued, passports were issued, citizens were assisted, and, in fact, she started some programs that really improved certain programs, especially in areas such as Citizen Services Abroad. She had said that the handling of the Pan Am 103 disaster...

Q: Which was blown up by terrorists over Lockerbie, Scotland.

TRUITT: Right. She said that the way in which this disaster was handled had left some interesting questions in some people's minds as to how we handled it after the fact. In many ways I could not disagree with her. The crash happened right before Christmas. I remember that, after the crash, a good friend of mine told me that on Christmas Day he was the only consular person in the Operations Center of the State Department dealing with this issue. He was not in the Office of Overseas Citizen Services [OCS]. He was in the Passport Office. No one from OCS was there. No one from OCS thought that they needed to be there. They were so glad to find someone from the Bureau of Consular Affairs to be in the Operations Center on Christmas Day. When you have that kind of major event now, that kind of coverage would never be allowed. It would not be tolerated.

At the time, the way that we dealt with people was the way we had always dealt with them. I would surely have been there. We would note that this person was dead, and this is his or her next of kin. We called but we did not follow up with a letter. People who have seen that kind of news don't always remember who called and, when they called, what they said. So there were a lot of times when we made phone calls. Then there was total denial later from families that we had called and what was said. We also realized that we had to do more, once a person dealt with a family. It was best that that person continue to deal with that family. That would have resolved a lot of problems.

Then we made a real improvement. There is no other country that does as much as we do for its citizens abroad. As much as we did in this case, we didn't seem to have spent a lot of time on it.

I think that people elsewhere, in the Visa Office and in the Passport Office, did not give ordinary citizens the kind of service that we gave them in OCS. Improvements were made in the kind of service provided.

Q: Now you were in ARA as what, Deputy...

TRUITT: Deputy Executive Director of the Bureau for three years, from September 1990, until June 1993.

Q: What did the deputy Executive Director do?

TRUITT: Well, the executive offices of the regional bureaus did several things. First, they managed the budgets of individual embassies in their particular regions, as well as the budget for the domestic side of the bureaus. We had another overlay because we also had to service the ambassador to the OAS [Organization of American States], who was a part of the ARA portfolio. So we managed those three budgets.

We were also responsible for coordinating the choices for all assignments to all of the posts under the supervision of the bureau, as well as all the jobs in the bureau, domestically. This was a pretty interesting process every year. We were responsible for putting together the paper work on whom we would like to see as ambassadors, whom we would like to see as Deputy Chiefs of Mission, and whom we would like to see as Principal Officers of consulates and consulates general. All of these are very key jobs, and they are vetted throughout the Department through something called the D Committee, because it is the Deputy Secretary's committee. So we were also responsible for those issues as well.

We also coordinated with the other bureaus in the Department on people responsible for information management in our particular part of the world. We were responsible for interfacing with the Bureau of Consular Affairs. As it turns out, the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs supervises the largest group of consulates of any regional bureau in the Department. We dealt with that continually, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs, on staffing issues, including part-timers. We also dealt a lot with FBO, the Office of Foreign Building Operations, to determine what buildings we would renovate, in what order, and how we would do it. So basically the executive office was the administrative arm of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs.

The job is so voluminous, after a while, at least in our case, that we divided up the portfolio. I do personnel work really well, so I took the personnel side. I also took over the basic management of running the office of ARA itself, which includes about 30 employees here in Washington, as well as the regional center located in Miami, FL. We'll get to that later. So we were looking at those things.

John Clark, the Executive Director of ARA, basically looked after the budget. He prepared the budget, in coordination with the Bureau of Financial Management. He handled administrative policy and the direct interface with the Assistant Secretary of ARA, Bernard Aronson. Bernie was unusual because he was the only Democrat working as Assistant Secretary of State in the Bush administration. So he obtained political support from other people. He was also a very close confidant of the Secretary of State.

So John Clark and I split up the Executive Office portfolio, and each of us dealt with the various parts of it. We would keep each other informed of what we were doing. That was the first time that I really got into using e-mail. Most of my e-mail every day dealt with people in the Executive Office of ARA and keeping people informed. I realized what a wonderful tool e-mail was, because you didn't have to find anyone to talk to them. You just sent the message to them.

During my first year in this job we also got into classified e-mail messages in a big way. So we also spent a lot of time with that. We had a lot of posts where the phone bills plummeted, since it didn't matter what you put into e-mail. You could just send it off. So I spent a lot of time on that.

I would say that I visited half of the posts in the ARA region during this three-year period. Unless you see them, you can't believe how bad some of them were or how good some of the others were. I did that and became the administrative interface with offices outside that bureau and on behalf of that bureau.

Q: You had come from the Bureau of Consular Affairs [CA], which had developed a name for itself as being quite progressive, as far as the use of the Executive Secretary was concerned. It was very innovative in various budgeting and personnel matters, as well as working with Congress. At least that was its reputation. Did you find any differences between the ways CA and ARA operated?

TRUITT: Every regional bureau is so much more political than CA was. The exchanges between people in Congress and ARA were something like light years ahead of where CA was. We just did things differently. We dealt more directly and more often with the Bureau of Congressional Affairs in the Department. We knew that we would see fairly high political figures going in and out of Assistant Secretary Bernie Aronson's office fairly often. So, although the Bureau of Consular Affairs had been very proactive in these areas, you could understand why people in other parts of the building would smile when someone referred to what CA was doing and say: "That's nice." However, for ARA, it was a daily occurrence, because they were always up on the Hill, dealing with Congressmen and their staffs. They were always in touch with the White House. That was the nuts and bolts of the system.

Q: How did you find the personnel system when you were working for ARA? It is part of State Department folklore that, once people got into Latin American affairs, they just stay there and never come out again during the rest of their careers. Maybe this was because of their language skills and so forth, plus the fact that there are a lot of countries which come under ARA. There is more of a mixture of posts, large and small, than in some of the other regional bureaus. ARA seems almost a world unto itself. Did you see any reflection of that when you were there?

TRUITT: I wouldn't say that ARA is particularly a world unto itself, in part because some of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries themselves had come from other bureaus, although others had been ambassadors in countries coming under ARA. By and large, the Deputy Assistant Secretaries had worked in a lot of different places. They had people who had worked with them and with whom they wanted to work again. Consequently, it wasn't so much that you would see a person going from post to post within the ARA bureau. It was the view that: "This is a person I want in this or that job. This job is his or her first choice, and how do you arrange it?" It was a fun, dynamic kind of process.

Among the larger problems that I saw was the fact that there were a lot of good jobs in ARA. So you would begin to see the phenomenon which I began to refer to as the poacher appear. That is, somebody who had had a really good job in EUR [Bureau of European Affairs] and was looking for a really nice, follow-on job might think that going to Argentina would be a good idea. Well, hello, hello, there were people in ARA who had worked there for a while. They might regard Argentina as pretty nice. They might begin to think that people from outside the ARA Bureau were trying to get a position in one of the more upscale posts that we had. Of course, they would not consider anything that would not be up to that upper echelon standard.

Our Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and everybody on that level, felt pretty good about figuring out whom they should be pushing. We also had a very interesting perspective, in that Assistant Secretary Bernie Aronson was very direct about making it clear that he wanted a mixed bag of people. That was also true about our Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

I remember one time meeting with the Deputy Assistant Secretary for EEO [Equal Employment Opportunities] and Bernie Aronson about two different jobs. We in ARA had the strongest EEO portfolio of any regional bureau in the Department, including blacks, women, and Hispanics. We had the best group all around but we needed to do better. I looked right at the Deputy Assistant Secretary for EEO and said: "I'll tell you what. How about if we have all the other bureaus get up to our level so that we can make progress together." Oh, she was horrified. We encountered a lot of other kinds of agendas.

I never got the feeling that it was true, in terms of personnel assignments, that once you were in an area, you were always in that area. However, I had people say to me: "Michelle, I never learned Spanish because I didn't want to go to ARA." I said: "Well, you know, there are five languages spoken in the ARA region. It's not just a Spanish-speaking region." However, people did not feel trapped in ARA. We did not have people saying that we need a non-area kind of person for a given job. This only came up twice in the three years I spent in ARA. These were people who were desperate to go to Madrid and only to Madrid. So these people did not think that they were world wide available, either.

Q: While you were doing this on the personnel side and also within the ARA bureau, what would you consider some of the major issues and problems that you had to deal with?

TRUITT: Most of the problems that we had dealt either with senior officers who believed that they had now worked long enough to be entitled to assignment to a given position, or persons who worked as special assistants or staff assistants for either Assistant Secretaries or Under Secretaries who wanted jobs for which they did not yet have the rank. We would find pressures in both categories on the entitlements of people in both groups to a given job. They would say, in effect, "I got this job because I am 'wonderful.' I know that this is an FSO-1 job. I am an FSO-2 officer, and other candidates can just step aside."

Now when you are talking about the position of political counselor in Santiago, Chile, which is one of the nicer assignments in ARA, it's pretty hard to say that we're going to have five officers, who are of the grade in question, step aside for a more junior officer.

A problem which would be more troublesome would involve people who would say: "I should be the Principal Officer, the DCM, or, better yet, the Ambassador to this or that country." I would have to work that problem through. I can remember one man who came to visit me five different times in three weeks to explain to me how important he was. I kept saying to him that if the personnel system does not find him important enough, he is not going to get the job. I said: "I don't work for you. I work for this bureau." Once people are senior officers it is very hard for them to be told that it is not your job to help them get a given position, which they have wanted all of their lives.

Q: As I do these interviews, I have been interested in these staff assistants. Becoming a staff assistant often turns out to be the way to get to the top. These people are often brilliant and bright, but in many ways, to use a term that is often used in the Foreign Service, these positions are essentially non substantive, because they are acting for somebody else. However, they are able to develop patrons. It's always seemed to me to be a bit pernicious to have this system of patronage work within a system supposedly based on merit.

TRUITT: As I looked at it, most of the people recruited to be staff assistants or special assistants are already considered the very best at whatever they do. They not only know the substance of their jobs but they have the skills to work at a lot of different levels. If you're a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary, you have to be able to deal well with the Deputy Assistant Secretaries in that office, as well as with your boss. You also have to be able to work with virtually every other bureau in the Department. You really have to have these personal skills.

I have seen some extremely talented people put into those staff assistant jobs. They are presumed, and often this presumption has substance to it, that they have people skills. That's what I saw. So I've never been as down on people in those jobs as some other people might be, because those people often are in a position where they can be appointed to these jobs. However, you're right to say that, if one of these people works for an Assistant Secretary or a Deputy Assistant Secretary, they really have a wonderful ability to do the job. Don't let your ego walk you back a little to yourself. These people accumulate a lot of enemies, as that patron pushes you forward. That patron will be gone from that position in two years or so. However, your peers will still be there. Occasionally, as I would point this out to some of these staff aides: "If you continue to 'tick off' all of your friends, you won't have any friends in a few years. If you want this or that job, you'll really be in trouble." I would say: "I can assure you of this."

I could tell you three or four stories about how long the knives waited to punish people. Often these staff aide positions were for one time only. I rarely saw special assistants or staff assistants with whom I wouldn't have wanted to work again. They were generally good.

Q: What about the political angle of this? I know that we've had it in Consular Affairs and in other places as well. There is a friend of a staffer in Congress, or something like that. They always have to be assigned somewhere and usually end up as a Cultural Attachï¿½ in Paris, or something like that. Did you have these forced placements of people? Did you have cases where you had to do something for so-and-so because the Speaker of the House of Representatives or someone of that kind wants to get rid of this person or get him a good job? Did you have much of that?

TRUITT: We did not have that kind of forced assignment abroad. During the time I was Deputy Executive Director of ARA I saw no direct leap by someone from outside of the Department's employment rolls to a job abroad. However, I saw this within the Department in Washington, as well as in the ARA Bureau.

In the case of a job at the FS-1 or equivalent GS level, it didn't matter which one it was. There might be half a dozen people who were highly qualified, who were career officers, and who might be considered for such a job. We were told, indirectly, that that consideration was irrelevant. This person was doing his job, and it wasn't going to be a Schedule C political appointment. Rather, it was going to be a Schedule A appointment, which was between a career and a political appointment, for a given length of time. It really didn't matter that there were all of these people who were highly qualified and who wanted this job, because it was a really nice job. However, this person from outside the Department was placed in this job. I would say to people: "This is what Assistant Secretary Bernie Aronson wants and this is what we're going to do, because he is the boss." After all, you have one boss at a time, and it is not your job to try to advise him that he is making a mistake.

When you get to be a presidential appointee, you really are somebody. Until then, it's for the presidential appointee to decide.

Q: What about the care and feeding of ambassadors? You had a lot of ambassadors in your area. How did you find that, particularly on the personnel side?

TRUITT: The ambassador I remember most was ambassador to a country of significant importance to us. During the three years I served in ARA, he called me once. I would give that person great kudos because he managed to get that post, and he knew what was going on. I knew one ambassador to a fairly small embassy and I thought he was pretentious. He called me every other day. Finally, I said to him: "You must be running up a big phone bill. Also, how important is it personally to excuse your secretary when you are involved in your secret diplomacy?"

I used to think about this a lot. Why would we have some ambassadors who made monumental messes and others who basically can relate everybody to somebody? The ambassadors were very different, and the main distinction was between career and non-career Ambassadors. They often had a sense of security about people, what they wanted, and how they could get there. This had nothing to do with anything but how important they thought they were. I had one ambassador who had grown up in a bully boys school. He was interesting to watch because he never worked. Everyone, including Bernie Aronson, knew this. We had other people who should have asked for things but didn't. They had been at post for about three months and had everything all figured out. There were other people who didn't seem to think seriously. You would think about them: "How many times can you cry 'wolf' before everyone knows that it's over?" Some ambassadors never changed. They were the same people who would let situations overtake them. Every one of them was different. Every individual ambassador had his own pattern.

Q: Did you find, from your point of view, that some Ambassadors sort of turned imperial and wanted special treatment? They felt that they were the president's representatives abroad, and what they wanted to be done had to be dealt with.

TRUITT: I had three imperial ambassadors, each of whom was a career officer. Occasionally, they would try to remind me that I was just a little cog in a little wheel, while they were all big wheels. Some of them had pretty entertaining requests in mind. Some of them would bring these to me, while others ignored me.

Q: What happened to, say, an imperial ambassador in ARA, in your experience? Does the system sort of close in behind him and support him? How did the system work?

TRUITT: I didn't really have to deal with a non-career ambassador. I think that would have turned out a little differently. Most imperial ambassadors kind of keep things very close in such a way that they have double protection. They feel that they can get away with it. They are part of the system and are working to get their next embassy. All of this I watched as I held this job. They displayed two, very different personas which would tell us how much they wanted something. Every one of these ambassadors had another embassy or another presidential appointment in mind. Most of them were pretty good at keeping track of things. The usual, three-year assignment as ambassador is a pretty good run. Somebody else is waiting in the wings behind you. So you are either going to retire or you're lining up the next, presidential appointment. But it was a very different persona that they displayed. You could see that.

One of the nice things about being in this office is that, when an ambassador came to Washington and was going to see the Under Secretary for Management, either the Executive Director or the Deputy Executive Director of the bureau took that Ambassador to meet him. So I got to meet the different figures showing up in a different environment if I paid attention.

I'll tell this story on myself just to give you an idea. The very first time I escorted an ambassador, it was Deane Hinton, the ambassador to Panama. He had been an ambassador many times before and had a lot of experience. It was nice to walk along beside him, but he didn't need any supervision. I was sort of giggling to myself that this was my first meeting with an ambassador. I would get to sit there and listen, because the ambassador knew everything that he wanted to say and needed no prompting. He was a really down to earth person. But I also got to see different types of ambassadors in these meetings.

Q: The Bush administration was in office at this time. Did you have any feel for the attention displayed toward Latin America? Obviously, tremendous things were happening, including the fall and dissolution of the Soviet Union, the war in the Persian Gulf, and all that. Did the lack of dramatic events in Latin America play any part in the attention paid to the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs?

TRUITT: I believe that Assistant Secretary Bernie Aronson was very successful in drawing attention to ARA. We had a number of issues on our platter. There was significant turmoil in Haiti at the time. We were able to keep that as a fairly high-profile issue. The civil war in El Salvador was coming to an end, and the Central American region needed to get proper assistance to recover from hostilities there. I think that Bernie Aronson was always very good in reminding people in the Department about these Western Hemisphere issues.

I remember one day, coming to work, and finding Pat Kennedy already sitting in my office. At the time, Pat was the Administrative Counselor in Egypt. So you wouldn't necessarily think of his being there for any particular reason. In fact, we were going to have a number of negotiations involving the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] and Israel. Pat is a brilliant and competent officer. He had been asked to figure out how we could handle those negotiations inside the State Department, because that is what the Secretary had said that we would be doing. I said: "Pat, what do you think?" He said: "I'm so glad that you asked. I need to use the ARA Conference Room. It is perfectly accessible, and we could hold a whole series of meetings there. I need adjoining space for offices. I can't afford to have you tell me 'No.'" My answer was obviously "Yes."

I went up that morning to the ARA staff meeting. I said: "Ladies and gentlemen, we will be giving up this room for three months and we'll be taking a suite of offices and turning it over for the Middle East peace process." Well, people just went into a fury. They asked how we could possibly do this. I said: "Do you want to have Secretary of State Baker come and address you personally? Let's think through what this is all about. Look at it from my perspective. The most important regional bureau for years was EUR [Bureau of European Affairs]. The next most important has been EA [Bureau of East Asian Affairs]. However, coming in third, every time, is NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs], which sometimes is at the top. By the way, I think that ARA is number four. But people in the ARA staff meeting were very much miffed. I said to them: "You have to remember where we are in the world. Nothing is going to be more important than these negotiations now on the Middle East peace process. I will find you another Conference Room and I will move the offices concerned." I was asked: "Is this really important?" I said: "Have you been reading the Washington Post?"

I had that kind of dialogue with people in ARA because they tended to lose a sense of reality. When you work in a given bureau, it's the most important bureau in the Department, from your point of view. I used to say to people: "We'll never be the most important regional bureau in the Department, except on a given day or for a given month."

Q: How did you find your relations with the other geographic bureaus and also with CA [Consular Affairs], as far as trading people, budgetary matters, and so forth. Was there much give and take, or did each bureau more or less live on its own?

TRUITT: The Executive Directors of the regional bureaus at that time had all been junior officers together and had all worked for John Thomas, who had been Assistant Secretary for Administration for a significant period of time in the Department. As a group, they all knew each other so well that there was never any contentiousness between them that they didn't solve in a way that just didn't come to your attention. Basically, that consideration applied during the whole period that I was Deputy Executive Director of ARA. So it was easy for me to see how, when you have known some people virtually forever, you could get the work done easily. Everybody knew that there could be poaching of personnel back and forth. Everybody knew that some bureaus would try to make a run for the budget in such a way that other bureaus would be odd bureau out. They might not like it, but they knew that it could happen. As far as I could see and at any time, there was never a situation where one bureau just went all out against another bureau.

As I was saying earlier, the regional bureaus were the princes of the realm. They are, in the first place, what the Department of State is all about. If there is money to be had and issues to be solved, I feel that the regional bureaus will get it firstest and bestest. I think of that because when I moved back to the Bureau of Consular Affairs, we as a bureau tended to look on the budget as a money pot, in a sense, for the Department. This outlook benefited the regional bureaus. That didn't mean that, because you provide the money, you also provide the resources.

Q: Looking at your time in ARA, from 1990 to 1993, the prince of princes, as you say, was EUR, or the Bureau of European Affairs. They were hit at this time in the way that any bureau would regard as an earthquake of shattering proportions. The Soviet Union went down the drain, and, I don't know, 10 or 12 new countries appeared on the horizon. We're talking about some of the former, constituent republics of the Soviet Union, such as Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and all of the countries in Central Asia. Did the other bureaus have any appreciation, including your own, that: "We've got to do something to help EUR out because this is something which it can't swallow on its own?" How did the system respond to this?

TRUITT: I'm not sure where the decision was made that we would open up the old Soviet Union, in the first place, and, secondly, open up a lot of posts within the former Soviet Union. There were all of these new embassies opening up. We would tell the world that we would do this without any additional resources. We did this. We told Congress that we would do this by reallocation of internal resources.

I was stunned at the time, because that meant that every bureau in the Department, other than EUR, was going to bleed to find money. Some bureaus had some pretty awful problems of their own which they had to finance. ARA, for one, was trying to finance putting Haiti back together as a government. So we just moved in that direction and we were not alone. NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] was still having a lot of crises on its hands. It had a lot of work to do. How was it going to give up a lot of resources to do that? How were we going to staff those new posts if we couldn't get new people?

There was a larger issue. Did Congress say this to Secretary of State Baker, because Congress did not give us any additional funds? Did the Secretary of State believe this? Did the President believe it? From a purely administrative point of view, the first question was: "How do you open up that part of the world?" No one ever said: "Okay, I'm going to make a big fight over this and I'm going to try to stop this as a project." Everybody knew how vital it was to do our very best to get these new embassies open and to spread out our resources, because that is how the United States does its business.

In many ways, this process was very traumatic and difficult. The staffing for many of those new posts was difficult. I was always startled at some of the issues. There were calls like: "Who speaks this exotic language?" The astonishing thing is that there were people who could speak, for example, Estonian. Such a person might just happen to be assigned to the embassy in Mexico City. Well, you just knew that the embassy in Mexico City was going to lose that person. You take a person out of any post, and it sometimes seems as if the world is coming to an end. That was always one of the most interesting things. It was much less a study of how this was going to work out. It was going to be difficult. The embassy in Mexico City would say: "I'm losing this person and I need an immediate replacement. It's the Department's 'fault' that this person is leaving."

My reaction was: "Excuse me? I don't think that it's my fault." However, in the last analysis, the bureaus concerned were able to redeploy sufficient resources, in spite of the fact that there were no increases of personnel available. Some people said: "Well, if we're opening up all of these posts, then, obviously, the embassy in Moscow will be smaller." However, in fact, the embassy in Moscow never got any smaller. From my consular perspective, one of the first things that happened in Moscow was that the visa workload went up from a modest 30,000 visas a year to three times that, especially as the security system opened up and people were able to travel. So we very quickly saw some major changes. However, nobody rose up and said: "You can't kick around EUR."

Q: Now that I am retired, I find that this is something that can be done quite often. That is, using retired Foreign Service Officers or civil servants to go and fill in spaces. As you were trying to fill jobs in these new posts, was this a kind of arrow that was put into your quiver during this time?

TRUITT: Oh, yes. Every regional bureau had its own roster of retired officers and moved very quickly to make use of them. This situation has since changed, although not as much as I would have changed it. Each bureau had its own group of WAEs.

Q: WAE meant...

TRUITT: When actually employed. This was to fill staffing gaps. Most of these gaps were either in the administrative or in the consular areas. The administrative counselor might be leaving the embassy in Mexico City, and there would be a four month gap in prospect. So we might say: "Oh, we have this retiree who used to do this job." So this would be fine, and we would send this person off to Mexico City to hold the job of administrative counselor for four months to fill in this gap. We would do this with contract people. Often, the busiest times in consular sections are also the time when people are being transferred, such as during the summer. You then send people in to fill in for one to three or four months. This was a good way to staff posts because there were few problems. People went to a country where knowledge of the language was required. We didn't send them unless the person already spoke the language. They were prepared to go. They actually signed up on their own, and we would literally trade people between the bureaus. You never knew who had used up all of his time. When somebody is employed for a given amount of time, they might make more money than they were permitted to do, and they had to pay the government back.

All of the bureaus used WAEs. We also tried summer-hire programs for our children in the Department of State and at posts overseas. We had a very active program of Foreign Service staff people being employed. One of the largest programs was in ARA because we had such a large consular operation. We used all of those arrangements to find temporary employment ways of getting through this peak. The valleys were fine, but the peaks threatened to be impossible to scale. We used WAEs, we used relatives of Foreign Service personnel, and we got through this period in this way.

Q: Looking back at it, what was probably the most difficult and unsolved program that you dealt with?

TRUITT: The most difficult problem basically involved telecommunications and information management. There were many reasons for this. There was a whole layer of management at our posts who were not information management literate. There was a whole group of people coming straight out of college who couldn't believe in doing office business in any other way than by using computers. Virtually every country under ARA had different telephone systems and was wired differently. Every embassy had a very different expectation of how to process data. The funding within the Department is also somewhat layered. It was often difficult to figure out how to explain this when you could tell your posts with reasonable certainty what was going to happen to them.

Also at that time, WANG was...

Q: WANG was our...

TRUITT: WANG was our basic provider of information management technology. Years earlier, the Department had contracted with the WANG Company to be our almost sole mechanism for purchasing computer hardware, whether this involved small box PCs [Personal Computers] or large boxes, in the DS-6000 and 8000 series. It would have been nice to have the DS-6000 and 8000 series computers, but many of our posts were running on something smaller, called a DS-100, and they were cramped.

We had people coming into the Department who were very much information management savvy and trying to run systems that had long ago become antiquated. Just as we, in our area, were going out to make some significant purchases of equipment, the WANG Company went bankrupt, and we were excluded from making any purchases whatsoever. Our embassy in Venezuela was down more than it was up for something like six months.

Q: When you say down, you mean that the centralized embassy computer was not functioning.

TRUITT: Yes. When the centralized computer didn't work, you couldn't run a clearance for the issuance of visas, you couldn't find out how much money you had in your budget for the people in the administrative area, and the ambassador wasn't really happy, either, because he couldn't communicate with other posts and the Department.

So we had these very, very difficult problems which we tried to solve. This was surely not unique in the ARA Bureau, but the bankruptcy of the WANG Company certainly had an adverse effect on virtually everything. It was a difficult time for us, for all of those different reasons. Our posts in every country had those problems, although every embassy operated a little differently. Some people didn't care what they had, while others wanted to use the new technology. That truly was one of the most difficult problems that we dealt with in this time frame and on a daily basis.

Q: Is there anything else that we should touch on before we move to your next assignment?

TRUITT: Perhaps we could talk about the hurricane. A hurricane passed through Florida August 23-24, 1992. The reason that I remember it so vividly is that my birthday falls almost in that time frame.

Q: Was this Hurricane Andrew?

TRUITT: I think that it was Andrew, although I am not sure of the name. Initially, it threatened to take out Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas. In Nassau, the highest point is 15 feet above sea level. That meant that the hurricane would take down everything that stood in its way.

I received a phone call that weekend, at about 3:00 AM on that Sunday morning. I was asked to come into the Department and help to staff the task force that was going to get the Embassy in Nassau through the hurricane. I went into the Department, and it was an interesting job. We didn't lose the Bahamas. The embassy was okay. However, we had a regional center in Miami, FL, that was near the zoo. In fact, the fencing of the zoo could be seen from our regional center. That part of Miami was flattened, and we lost our regional center.

This made for a very interesting dynamic, because we had our first domestic operation within the Bureau of Personnel. A lot of people wanted to handle it as if it were a bullet. The rules for how you deal with it and what you do about it were dramatically different. It was a real eye opener for a lot of people as we went through that experience. It was a real eye opener, in particular, for a lot of people in the Foreign Service who staffed the Miami regional center. They were prepared for a very different existence than the one we could provide. It was an eye opener to try and find places for them to go to.

We removed everybody to Fort Lauderdale, FL. The U.S. Navy had facilities in Fort Lauderdale that it was phasing out of. We moved everything to Fort Lauderdale, which created incredible concern. I will always remember this because people who had lived close to the regional center site near the Miami zoo found that Fort Lauderdale was a long commute from Miami. They were beside themselves. They had lost everything. It was a very difficult time for us and for the people who worked down there, as well as for the Department in how it deals with a domestic crash, rather than something that happens abroad.

I will always remember the hurricane in terms of how it affected even ARA, the regional bureau. People kept calling us up from the other bureaus and laughing at us, as it were. We kept saying that this was the extent of this disaster but that it could happen elsewhere. We wouldn't have thought that it would happen in the way that it did, but it did create problems.

Q: What was the Miami regional center doing?

TRUITT: The Miami center was our regional office for providing administrative assistance to all of our posts in the ARA area. Rather than have people in Washington serve ARA, it had been found that it was easier, cheaper, and faster to put these services in Miami. For example, we had regional personnel officers stationed there. All of these regional people worked out of Miami. This was just a more efficient way for us to do business, because Miami was the first port of entry into the United States, basically for almost anything coming from the ARA area. Through this regional center, we were able to provide our posts with better support from Miami than we ever could have provided from Washington.

In fact, a lot of people in the Foreign Service preferred tours of duty in Miami, because they counted as stateside assignments. However, they were not in Washington. A lot of them didn't like being in Washington, so it worked out very well and to everybody's advantage, until the hurricane of 1992.

Q: How about papers, records, and all of that?

TRUITT: We lost virtually everything in the regional center. Only two buildings survived of the structures in which the center had been located. These included the newest buildings in the complex. The center did not provide housing for us. We had a warehouse that was totally destroyed. The roof fell in. In the case of the office building, the roof collapsed. There was total damage from water, and very little was salvaged. In fact, the buildings were ultimately razed. Virtually everything that we had there was destroyed. It taught us a lot about the fact that, although the center was located in a theoretically safe part of the world, we had to remember that natural hazards still exist.

Q: Did you have duplicate records and were you able to reconstitute them again?

TRUITT: In ARA, we were directly responsible for only certain parts of that regional center. We were responsible for the personnel work and for running the center. However, the information management and the DS [Diplomatic Security] people had their own records. Personnel records were basically duplicated elsewhere, either at the Foreign Service post being served or were back here in Washington. The only records of any size that we really lost were those which pertained to the regional center itself. They were not as critical. I don't know about the records that other bureaus had on file in the Miami regional center. Basically, ARA was a landlord to them and had a small section of our own.

Q: I would have thought that in terms of the regional center and also from the Washington perspective you had all of this. However, I would have thought that, because of the ties to the United States, you would have looked at Mexico differently, for example, than any other post, as far as management goes. Was this true?

TRUITT: Mexico accounted for 10 percent of our resources. So it was kind of like a gorilla. It's a very important country because so much happens there, from both the economic and political point of view. It also has a huge consular operation. It was interesting to us because Ambassador Negroponte was a very activist Ambassador.

In any case, Ambassador Negroponte sent in a cable to the Department one year, and I can't remember which year, but it was right during the Christmas and New Year's holidays, in which he proposed closing our consulate in Guadalajara, a fairly large post. He thought that if he could close it, he would save a huge amount of money for the Embassy and could redirect some of those resources elsewhere.

I'm not sure that anybody understood how difficult it is to close a Foreign Service post. In fact, the consulate in Guadalajara is still open to this day. The consulate in Guadalajara services one of the largest retirement communities outside of the United States. The retirees living there rose up in righteous indignation and, using their own money, sent two people in Washington to lobby Congress to keep the consulate open. Subsequently, the post changed in its makeup, but it is still open.

Mexico is a country where huge amounts of money are spent, because there is a lot of activity being handled there. Mexico has a fairly dynamic society, so it always got a lot of attention. Within the State Department there is an office responsible for Mexico only, within the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs [ARA]. There is also a Borders Issues Office as part of that, so a lot of our resources, even in Washington, went to Mexico. These included oil and political issues, and following the PAN [National Action Party], the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], and all of that. It is just a very high-profile and upscale country. During the whole time I was in ARA, Ambassador Negroponte was a very up front, pro-active, and aggressive Ambassador.

There was always an interesting dialogue between the Embassy in Mexico City and the Department. The Embassy was one of the major players within ARA.

Q: How about the Organization of American States [OAS]? How was that viewed?

TRUITT: The OAS was viewed in various ways, depending on whether there was some hot issue under consideration hat involved the ARA region. The OAS itself was unique because it is an international organization and has an international perspective. The Mission to the OAS includes the offices of the ambassador, the deputy chief of mission, and the political, economic, and administrative officers. All of the personnel assigned to these offices have office space with us there in ARA in Washington. And just a short walk down the street, four or five blocks away, is the OAS Headquarters itself. From my perspective, most of the time when I dealt with various issues involving our Mission to the OAS, these involved straight administrative matters concerning how we funded that office and how well we kept up with providing what it needed.

Toward the end of my tour in ARA, we got involved in one very interesting issue, which was who would pay for OAS mailings which went into the U.S. Postal System. We had a system under which the OAS would pay for its mailings, on a reimbursable basis. That is, we would pay for them first and then be reimbursed.

Other issues were fairly few and far between. For the most part, they were straight administrative and financial issues, because the OAS is an international organization. There was a direct give-and-take within the Department every day with Ambassadors from the countries that were members of the OAS. So I didn't have as much to do with those issues, except for money and staffing of our OAS Mission.

Q: Then you left this fairly busy job in ARA in 1993. Where did you go then?

TRUITT: There was a change in administrations.

Q: This brought in the Clinton administration, in January 1993.

TRUITT: We were now under the Clinton administration. A couple of things had occurred, including the passport issue involving Assistant Secretary Betty Tamposi and then candidate Bill Clinton, which has appeared a lot in the news. So I won't go into it in any detail. I only watched this issue evolve from afar.

Q: You might give us just a brief summary of what it was.

TRUITT: As I understand it, there were some people in the Republican Party who believed that in the passport file of Bill Clinton there might be evidence showing that he had tried to renounce his U.S. nationality during the Vietnam War. He was very much opposed to the war. Assistant Secretary Betty Tamposi was a true activist and tried to locate all passport files relevant to this matter. If these files indicated that these allegations were true, this might well shoot down Bill Clinton as a presidential candidate in 1992.

For her part in this, she was summarily fired from the Department by then Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger. In fact, other people were caught up in that matter as well. However, as I saw the pendulum moving, there was a concerted effort to have a career officer assigned as the Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Consular Affairs. So Ambassador Mary Ryan, who had been the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs for a short period of time...

Q: She was one of those people whom Betty Tamposi had sent on her way.

TRUITT: Betty Tamposi invited Mary Ryan to leave the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Mary Ryan eventually became the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs. In that role, she asked me if I would become the Executive Director of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. So in June 1993, I left ARA to become the Executive Director of the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Q: Today is April 17, 1998. We're continuing with our interview of Michelle Truitt. So, Michelle, in 1993 you took over as Executive Director of CA. That lasted from when to when?

TRUITT: I retired from the Department on March 31, 1995.

Q: So we're talking about a period of about two years that you served as Executive Director of CA.

TRUITT: A little less than two years.

Q: In many ways, being the Executive Director of CA is one of the more innovative jobs you held because things are fairly fixed in the Bureau of European Affairs and other bureaus. However, CA is a bureau that receives a lot of money, and there are a lot of things going on. How did you find CA this time? When you first took over this job, did you have an agenda? How did things work out?

TRUITT: There was an agenda already being implemented. That involved legislation under consideration in Congress to collect for the first time a processing fee for the issuance of non-immigrant visas. Earlier, in the 1980s, we had begun to issue the machine readable visa. It was costly and innovative. However, the advantage of the machine readable visa was that you could take any passport, whether it was machine readable or not, and, in fact, make it into a machine readable document. This was because our visa basically captured the data in the passport and put it in a format that we could be machine readable at any port of entry in the United States.

Since we had dealt with that issue, there had been a push to see whether, in fact, we should not charge individual applicants a processing fee. Previously, the whole paradigm for the issuance of non-immigrant visas for us had been based on reciprocity with other countries. We did not charge a citizen of a given country for the issuance of one of our visas if that country did not charge one of our citizens for a visa to visit it. Therefore, on the basis of reciprocity, we also said that there would be no charge for a visa. We said: "All right, we'll keep that arrangement. However, we will collect a worldwide processing fee." As I entered CA/EX [Executive Office of the Bureau of Consular Affairs], one of the post management officers had been given the task of putting together the paperwork to collect such a fee. However, the concept was so new and the idea was so ill-defined that he felt that he had not yet had proper directions on this matter.

In fact, I spent the next year of my time working with this officer, with other officers in the Department, and with other U.S. Government agencies, in addition to providing some explanations up on the Hill [in Congress] on what the processing fee would do for us and how we would begin to collect it.

Q: It's all very well to say that this was a processing fee. However, take Greece as an example. The fact of the matter is that a Greek citizen would have to pay in order to get into the United States, whereas an American did not have to pay to get into Greece. That was the reality, no matter what you may call it.

TRUITT: Well, it was not the issuance fee that caused the problem. In fact, if there were an issuance fee, it would be layered right upon the processing fee. In any case, the processing and the technology were expensive. There were no additional resources being provided to the Department. In fact, Congress was willing to look at this processing fee as a tool to enhance the whole information management structure, as it turned out, not only of the Bureau of Consular Affairs but also of the whole Department. Keep in mind that our information management technology in any case sits upon the platform of consular posts involved and so returns to the Department. A lot of people saw this concept as an opportunity to give us the infrastructure we needed, when we weren't getting the funds to obtain it in any other way. The Bureau of Consular Affairs was being pushed to make sure that we had machine readable visas worldwide.

In fact, as a part of that instruction from Congress, we showed them that without the processing fee, it would take us 10 years to implement machine readable visas worldwide. With the processing fee, we were committed to doing this within two years because we would have the money to provide the necessary equipment, in the out years, to places on the machine readable list.

Q: What about the role of the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]? Back in the early 1980s I was the only State Department Liaison Officer with the INS. They were always going their own way. They would not do things jointly with the State Department in connection with machine readable passports and other things. How did this work out? Basically, INS was going to have to be able to read these passports and visas.

TRUITT: We already had machine readable equipment at ports of entry for INS and also for the Bureau of Customs. By this time I think that the INS also had a different mind set because we were able to work with them very closely on the immigrant visa issuing segment to tie in our data banks with theirs, primarily at our consular posts which handled immigrant visas.

Donna Hamilton, who was my Deputy Executive Director and is now the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, was the person from our office designated to work with INS on more complex, data sharing issues. So, from that point of view, data sharing was well and favorably handled by all of the U.S. Government agencies which had an interest in the entry and exit of people from the United States. The Bureau of Customs and INS were on board, and the Department of State was committed to the process. So convincing other U.S. Government agencies was not a major issue for us.

Our bigger problems were within the Department, because the Bureau of Financial Management and Policy did not understand how the process would work. Consequently, we became the point organization with the Treasury Department on how we would implement the movement of fees, primarily collected in foreign currencies; how those fees would come back into the United States; and how they would be credited directly to the account of the Department of State. We had to keep in mind that this would be the first fee collected under the aegis of the Bureau of Consular Affairs that did not go into the general revenues of the U.S. Treasury Department. These fees would come directly back to the Treasury Department and would be reallocated for the use of the Department of State. So those became larger issues, post by post.

Every Foreign Service post had its own arrangements for handling its business and how we would get the fee collection system up and running and implemented, as soon as the legislation permitting the collection of the fees was passed.

Q: How did the various bureaucracies respond to this?

TRUITT: Except for the Bureau of Consular Affairs, the bureaucracy in the State Department did not respond well. In my view, this was always the greatest problem. The Bureau of Consular Affairs was treasured because of the money it collected. It is usually shunned by other elements of the State Department because our consular sections lead to lines of waiting people and work problems at every visa issuing post in the world. In many ways we were left to our own devices to work out our problems. And we did. We spent an endless amount of time preparing virtually all of the cables to each of our consular posts, with clearances from other agencies, on how the fees would be collected, how they would be accounted for, and how the money would be moved back to the United States. So it was a very interesting process, because we became almost a sink or swim bureau dealing with this. Everybody was kind of interested in how it would go. No one really knew how it would work out.

It was fascinating to see the number of people who took credit for this process, which now generates at least $150 million a year for the Department. Most people kept saying: "Gee, Michelle, we hope it works out for you." Well, that's not the way to solve a problem as an institutional issue. It was the duty of the Department to convince Congress that this was the right thing to do. Sometimes the post management officers in the various, regional bureaus who worked with us would say: "Michelle, are we going to solve this?" I said: "We'll get through this, but not with the coherent process that we would normally hope for." This was because people were afraid, but we had no choice. I said: "Even though we're afraid, we're going to climb the mountain, as it were. Other people have more latitude in solving their problems. We have been charged with the responsibility for handling this matter."

We prepared endless briefing papers for the then Under Secretary for Management, which is itself a pretty time-consuming process. I think that it was only later, when he went on to another position and I retired that people really began to appreciate what the money collected in visa processing fees was being used for and how it was being spent. In fact, today the visa processing fees are still a cornerstone of how the Department of State does its business. I think that the collection of processing fees will expand in the future. However, this was the most important piece of legislation involving us in CA that we worked on within the Department. At the same time, people did not appreciate where these processing fees were going to take them until long after this legislation was implemented.

Q: This was during the period from 1993 to 1995. This was implemented under the Clinton administration. Vice President Gore had been charged with the task of re-inventing government. I would have thought that this processing fee would have fit very well into that idea.

TRUITT: Basically, it was not considered a reinvention by any one of us. It was never put forward as one of the reinvention initiatives proposed by the Department of State. In fact, people looked at it as little as possible, except when they had to deal with it.

The reinvention initiative for the Bureau of Consular Affairs concerned a different matter. It involved the reorganization of the Office of Overseas Citizen Services and the creation of the new Office for Children's Issues. This was concerned primarily with how to deal with adoptions and with children who had been abducted. You might say that that proposal became the reinvention star of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, rather than the initiation of the visa processing fee. So this fee was not thought of so much as a reinvention initiative as it was a revenue enhancement program.

In this respect you see an interesting bifurcation between what someone called a substantive issue. That is, the establishment of the Office for Children's Issues. In the case of the visa processing fee we were just collecting money, without understanding what the collection of that money would actually do for us.

You know, you can't focus on everything at once. From my perspective, the Gore management initiatives involved a lot more fuss and feathers than they really concerned changing how the Department of State did its business or streamlined its efforts. I even went and heard Vice President Gore speak on these management initiatives. Not that that was not an important initiative. Many U.S. citizens adopt children abroad, and many U.S. citizens find their children abducted by one of the parents who is separated or divorced from the other parent. The establishment of the Office for Children's Issues was good and suited to those purposes.

However, I think that considerations of this kind affected every bureau in the Department. Money and people are always looked at as something that anybody can figure out, except when the going gets tough. The substantive issues are the ones that you try to focus on. That is, we have a new vision and a new direction to pursue.

Q: If we may return to the visa processing fee. Were there any objections to the collection of this fee? We don't require the presentation of a U.S. visa for the citizens of some countries who wish to visit this country. Mainly this affects Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and countries like that. This provision meant that if you were coming, say, from the Philippines, it involved quite a drain on the Philippine balance of payments and next to none, for example, on the French balance of payments.

TRUITT: No foreign government really complained. In fact, those governments that might have complained the most were those where we already had the visa waiver pilot program in effect. If this program were a child, it would probably be old enough to graduate from high school by now. [Laughter] Visa waivers seem to be something that never ends. It is, in fact, a program which will probably be with us forever.

Returning to your question, virtually no government raised the visa processing fee as a major issue. In fact, most governments understood very clearly what we were trying to do and why we would ask an individual applicant to finance the issuance of his visa. The fee involved was not significantly high, bearing in mind that anyone who wanted to come to the United States, say, from the Philippines, as a bona fide visitor would be paying a substantial amount of money for air fare and also spend a substantial amount of money to take care of his or her needs while they were here. So a $20 visa processing fee did not become a major, bilateral issue with any country.

I thought that the Dominican Republic would raise this issue, if only because our whole visa issuing process there is a political issue for Dominicans, in addition to the visa processing issue as such. However, there was nothing that required intercession at the political level.

Q: What about the equipment required for visa processing? You get these programs going, and then you add the cost of the equipment required all over the world. I would think that you were assuming that the machinery would work. How did you find that?

TRUITT: We had been working with this technology for quite a long period of time. There were two or three vendors who had regularly come up with the PCs and the printers...

Q: The PCs are personal computers.

TRUITT: Yes. Some of the larger Foreign Service posts used systems that were based on WANG computers. We continued to put in WANG 6000 and 8000 systems at the larger posts. We were able to continue with those programs. We had three really different kinds of posts. We had the mega posts or very large posts, the medium sized posts, and the very small posts. We developed what we thought were significant technologies for each type of post, including individual name check systems. So a smaller post would have its own data bank, since it would primarily deal with nationals of the country in which the post was located. It didn't need the same kind of data bank that, say, the embassy in London, which sees people from all over the world, would require. We developed three separate technologies.

We had some very fine contractors who had teams ready to go to install the equipment and systems. If we had the money, they would find the teams to go and install the equipment and handle the training of the people who operated them. That was part of our commitment, because that was what we had to promise Congress that we would do, before the legislation was passed. Congress told us: "Okay, you have your 10-year plan. What is your two-year plan?" We installed these systems within the time frame that Congress gave us, which was very short. We gave Congress individual manuals explaining how we would install these systems at every consular post in turn. And we met that commitment.

Q: Well, you met the time frame and completed this action in two years. This was a major effort. What happened to the money collected under the category of visa processing fees afterwards? It looks as if you spent all of the money available up front. Yet the money keeps coming in.

TRUITT: Some of the systems installed are already rather old. By the time we finished installing them throughout the world, you could go in and retrofit and upgrade everything which, by that time, was looking pretty shaky. And we would continue to advance the technology in use. I believe that the Department of State is still doing this, although I haven't followed this in any detail. When I retired, I tried to leave all of this behind me. I still have some close friends in the Department and keep in touch with them on various issues. I know that the visa processing fee continues to be collected. I know that the fee proceeds have been directed to other, consular-based efforts where, indeed, money to support them was in short supply.

So the fee continues to be collected. I think that it will enhance the capacity of the individual posts to do their business and the Department's ability to continue to develop, primarily with the language algorithm. Every computer language needs an algorithm. As I said before, how do you spell Qadhafi? There are some 50 different ways. We had contractors to develop those algorithms. We need to have them all in place, be very interchangeable, and represent the state of the art. There are all kinds of additional funds which are needed to make our data bases the most sophisticated in the world, as well as the most user friendly. Keep in mind that some of the systems which you and I saw worked were certainly not as user friendly as you and I would have liked them to be.

Q: As we developed the machine readable system, was there a problem involved in it? When the American passport became machine readable, one of the things that was absolutely insisted on was that there would be no secret information in it.

TRUITT: Right. By and large, the data pages of the machine readable passport book, as we would understand it, became critical information for us. As far as I know, there was nothing in there that you would not be able to see. However, one of the things that we were discussing, and I think that the Department will include in the visa, because it is doing it for the border crossing card, is some type of identifier. This may be a thumb print or some kind of portrayal of the retina of the eye. When this is further developed, the data page of the U.S. passport would not only provide the usual information and a photo but it would also contain an identifier unique to the bearer. However, forgers will still be able to make photo substitutions, no matter how sophisticated our systems may be. There will always be sophisticated forgers out there.

However, that is the direction in which we are moving. I think that you will begin to see identifiers which may not be readily understandable. They will be there to be read. I might mention the inch pass which is installed in Newark, NJ (New Jersey). If you have already enrolled as a U.S. citizen, you don't need to wait in line in Newark. You put your hand and your passport up to a machine reader to prove that you are a U.S. citizen. I think that that will also happen in connection with visas to enter the U.S.

Q: Did you find that other governments were looking at what we were doing and, perhaps, were interested in it?

TRUITT: Other governments are always interested in matters of this kind. There is an international organization called ICAO, or the International Civil Aeronautics Organization. That organization is made up of representatives of governments and also of private industry, including airlines. It tries to set common standards. So we work a lot with them. However, we also occasionally get requests from representatives of foreign governments to see what we are doing, primarily on the passport side and a lot less on the visa side. The machine readable visa foil looks a lot like the passport data page. People are always interested in our technology, especially since governments like ours can afford to invest the additional funds required to apply the technology to that level.

Q: How did you find that the Bureau of Consular Affairs responded to this new challenge?

TRUITT: Every consular post was as interesting as its principal officer or chief of the consular section. Some consular chiefs were excited about this challenge as an affirmative, positive, imaginative way to do business. That attitude also tied into how well the financial services people at the post dealt with it. In some cases, individual negotiations were required with banks. Some of these negotiations concerned how the post would collect the fees internally and how these funds would be deposited.

We also came across people who said: "I don't like this." It took a lot longer to get them to understand the new system. We began to implement this system with 15 posts, I believe. We said: "This is not a 'freedom of choice' plan. This is a money issue for the Department. Congress has told us that we will do it." So it was much more an issue of having the legislation passed and signed into law and how the individual posts responded to it. Some of the people at the posts had read everything that we had sent out to explain the system. Some of them simply trashed this material [i.e., threw it away]. Some of them thought that it would never be implemented and didn't care. So for every consular post we tended to have a different reaction. Sometimes it was offensive to us. [Laughter] Sometimes the attitude was: "We can make this new system work and we're going to do ourselves 'proud.'"

I think that by the time the implementation of this new process was in the second year, it was functioning well. It was almost like anything else that is new and different. Everybody knew how to deal with it and did it. During the first year implementation of this system was pretty difficult. In fact, tracking the funds collected was a laborious job for everyone. We had to prepare monthly reports to the Under Secretary for Management. For some posts we wouldn't have anything, and the Under Secretary would try to hold us personally responsible for this. We would say: "We didn't collect the money. We don't know where it is, but we are trying to find it. We're telling you that the posts can't tell us where it is." It was such a hot, political subject that we were always where the lightning was striking as we tried to deal with it.

Q: At this point Mary Ryan had returned to the Bureau as the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs.

TRUITT: That is correct.

Q: How did you work together? As we mentioned earlier on, there have been times when the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs was difficult to deal with.

TRUITT: I think that Mary Ryan was delighted to get the job and had substantially enjoyed her previous tenure in Consular Affairs. She was truly flattered and excited about being Assistant Secretary for that bureau. She was not a consular officer by background, as Joan Clark had been. She was determined that her tenure in the job would be successful and innovative. Her management style included a morning staff meeting where she tried to find out what was going on. She would ask: "What about this and what about that?" Things went on very much in that direction. She also tried to keep a lot of different irons in the fire where they needed to be. She kept in mind that the Passport Office was somewhat wavering, since it had some passport agencies with very antiquated equipment. The question was how to solve that problem? She wanted to know how we could make sure that we had the right people in the right jobs. She had a mixed bag of problems facing her. She also knew that the abrupt departure of her predecessor, Betty Tamposi, had cast a pall on the Bureau of Consular Affairs. In a lot of ways people felt within themselves, "My God, we'll never recover from this." People outside the Bureau were saying: "Oh, THAT bureau? We all remember what that was all about."

So Mary Ryan took all of that very seriously and did a lot of things very quickly. She visited a lot of our consular posts and all of the passport agencies. She said her piece and got people energized and believing that she was who she was. I think that this was very important for the Bureau. She herself had to deal with an Under Secretary for Management who was a very political animal who had been in the Department previously. He had been Assistant Secretary for African Affairs in the Carter administration. I'm told that he was a junior Foreign Service Officer at one time.

Q: Dick Moose?

TRUITT: Dick Moose. He had some of his own agendas. I don't think that he was as conversant in consular affairs as he was interested in other parts of his domain. For Mary Ryan, that characteristic of Dick Moose had its pluses and minuses. However, she truly brought energy to the job. She continues in that job which, I think, is a sign that people think that she has done it well and that she enjoys it.

Q: Did you find any problems in dealing with this odd mix of having a very large passport agency which is essentially made up of Civil Service people? You had been there before and came out of there. How did this meld on to the Foreign Service overseas establishment? Was there any problem with this?

TRUITT: I think that there are always problems, but they're not necessarily what you would expect. The problem is that every part of the consular affairs business seems to be in high gear at the same time. People want visas to come to the U.S. for the summer. U.S. citizens want passports to travel in the summer. There is always this great push involved in how to satisfy all of these resource needs at the same time. The Department had begun to issue ten-year passports in the past. When those passports expired, the population increased, and the economy was doing well, and there was going to be a real need to satisfy a huge demand for passports. The passport demand and the demand for overseas citizen services have to be the highest priorities of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, because this involves satisfying the needs of U.S. citizens, who must come first.

On the other hand, you surely don't want to tick off someone here in the U.S., who is also a U.S. citizen and is expecting his brother to come from Manila for a visit. So we saw all of those needs converging and swirling around, with people saying: "I need this, and I need that." One of the things that you realize after a while, when you are Executive Director of the Bureau, is that you never make anyone happy for very long. It's always a matter of people thinking: "I don't remember what you did for me yesterday." So you just kind of shrug your shoulders, go ahead, and satisfy the demands of the day. You deal with people who are not always as happy as they should be or could be. And they are under high stress. People who darken your door are there because something has gone wrong for them, and everyone believes that he or she is the center of the universe.

Every post is that way, and I assure you that every Deputy Assistant Secretary is that way. The best job that you can do as the Executive Director is to try to satisfy as many demands as you can. Then, when there is a priority demand, you say your piece. You say it at the morning staff meeting. If somebody else disagrees with you, you have an Assistant Secretary who says: "Okay, this is the way it goes."

However, the Passport Agencies operate so independently and are far away, to begin with. They are not affected quite the same way as if everything were done centrally. Because the consular business has always been done that way, everyone understands how it is going to work out for everybody.

Among the good things that we had is that we had our own, independent hiring authority. We didn't have to go through the Bureau of Personnel. Those projections came in every year. Within the hiring limit which we had, which we always said was too low, the Under Secretary for Management was always much less generous than he should have been to satisfy this demand. So we started to distribute the resources as best we could. Then we would begin to send people out on TDY [temporary duty]. This is the way it always has been and continues to be. If you work in Washington, and you're not assigned to a foreign service post or a passport agency, you may find yourself being asked to volunteer to go out to a passport agency to work on a temporary basis or out to a Foreign Service post.

I had dinner the other night with a friend of mine. Someone came to her the other day and said: "Well, will you be volunteering for the embassy in Warsaw or Beirut?" She said: "Excuse me?" No one had told her that she was volunteering. The same thing is done for passport agencies. The high level of demand for passport services will start as early as March 1 in a given year, and as late as April 15, and will only flatten out after Bastille Day [July 14]. So you had better be prepared to say that we will stop doing a lot of things in Washington to satisfy the demand of the traveling public. This could mean the traveling public in the sense of aliens at overseas post or it could mean the traveling public here in the United States. You just go and do it.

Q: Did you find that, within the Bureau of Consular Affairs, you could assign people? Was it difficult to move people around?

TRUITT: That depended on the managers. Some managers appreciated that that is how you do business. Some managers would dig in their heels and say: "You don't understand how important I am." It would differ from manager to manager.

The other thing we did, especially for the posts abroad, was to assign people from a group of retired Foreign Service Officers. With the resources available from machine readable funding, we had the resources to do that. We would send these retired officers out, sometimes for two months, and sometimes for six months. So we would do whatever we needed to do. However, you always will have managers who will say: "My work is so important that I can't give you anyone this year." I would always go to my people and say: "One of you is volunteering to do something." Because when I would ask them, I always wanted to be able to say: "This person has volunteered." It embarrasses other managers into volunteering their people if I have already done so. People might giggle at this and say: "Ah, I must remember this for the future." If you have already gotten your people to volunteer, everybody else more or less has to fall into line, or else they look silly.

Q: You've already mentioned this before, but did you find that the Bureau of Consular Affairs was still sort of outside the regular network, particularly of the geographic bureaus?

TRUITT: I think that, by and large, all of the bureaus coming under the Under Secretary for Management were that way. I really felt that when I worked in ARA [Bureau of Inter-American Affairs], I understood how to do my business in a regional bureau, when I really wanted to get work done. I knew how to deal with the Bureaus of Administration, Diplomatic Security, and Consular Affairs. Indeed, you saw these bureaus differently. I appreciated that more when I was in Consular Affairs. I understood how that bureau works. That kind of shows you how the Department works.

Q: What about the technology field? The Department has its own technical people. I'm talking about the Department as a whole. Does Consular Affairs have its own technical bureau, as it were?

TRUITT: The Bureau of Consular Affairs has always been on the cutting edge of information technology, because this was the only way to do its business. In fact, Consular Affairs has its own technology division dealing with machine readable visas, including immigrant visas. We had what was, in effect, a data bank category dividing U.S. citizen and alien information pertaining to cases in which it might be questionable for us to issue documents. This is recognized within the Department, although not everyone is exactly happy about that.

In fact, when I was in Consular Affairs, I spent a lot of my time traveling abroad with the then Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Management. We would go to posts and say: "We have two different segments here. This is the part of the Department which provides your infrastructure. This is what you do. We are THE major player abroad having to work on your 'platforms.' In Consular Affairs, I will do anything I can to make sure that my people work best on your platform. Your job is to make your platform work best for us."

We spent a lot of time on that. We went to one meeting of all of the regional information managers worldwide. I said: "I don't care what your 'platform' is. You tell me what it is, and we'll try to work with it. But if you don't tell me and you don't work with me, I'll fail and you'll look worse. I will help you look embarrassed." I said: "You know, I don't care what you have out there, as long as you tell me what it is. We will try to make it work for Washington." They would laugh, and I would say: "You know, I am serious. You try it, and we'll work with it. I know that every country is different when you look at it. What you find to work with in a host country is an adventure every time, as well as when you try to put up a structure to satisfy an embassy. So I'm not going to try to say to you that you've got to do it differently. I know that you can't. But please don't tell me that you can't work with me once you've got your infrastructure in place."

I said that sometimes, as we have done before, we have put in, say, a WANG 6000 system. I only need about 25 percent of the time of that computer. That means that the post gets to use it for the other 75 percent of the time. The Bureau of Consular Affairs pays for what everybody uses. I got a very good and dynamic dialogue working with all of that. However, the issue is much larger than that. In the past, if you looked at the Department's budget and contracting scenario every year, the Bureau of Administration had the information management portfolio at the time. Now, I'm told, there is a separate chief Information Officer and a new Bureau of Information Management devoted only to that matter. That wasn't how I had it. During my time, the information management group was in the Bureau of Administration. There were almost 1,000 people doing everything from handling couriers to running the Department library, to worrying about this.

In every regional bureau, you also had your own budget for information management, as we did, when I was in ARA. The Bureau of Consular Affairs had its budget for information management. Do you know how much of a donnybrook that is, trying to make sure that everybody keeps those pieces together? In my view, I thought that it was the future of how we would do business. It surely was critical for the visa side of what we did. When you're dealing with over 7.0 million applicants for visas, you had better pay attention to that. Outside of worrying about the processing fees, I spent a lot of my time on how we could improve the individual posts and make sure that they had the best possible information management structure to handle their business. This was because I thought that this was how they could function and survive. Even to this day, I track back to that part of the business because I became so interested in technology and what it does, not only in connection with the Department of State.

Although I haven't worried much about what happened to the machine readable visa fees, I track what the Department is doing in the field of information management.

Q: Were you seeing a new type of officer coming into the field of information management? Was the State Department recruiting such people?

TRUITT: The new officers would come into consular training. They were products of our colleges and universities, where they were required to own a personal computer when they were freshmen. They would look at some of our systems and say: "You must be joking! Is this all that you have?" So I think that it has been good for the Department to hire people who are computer literate, just as my child is. They take so much for granted and, of course, this just helps us move forward to the state of the art.

The Department responded very quickly. We now have here in the FSI a dean for Basic Information Management Studies. He is the newest dean at the FSI. This helped us move very quickly. You could send a junior Foreign Service Officer to a post where he would be the only visa-issuing officer. You could tell him: "This is your 'stand alone' computer, and this is where you work." I think that the other thing that has been good as well is that we have been getting computer literate officers who are increasingly senior in the service. They have been coming back to Washington to be office directors and Deputy Assistant Secretaries. I know some of these people. They are very computer literate and very savvy. They know what these computers can do. In my view, that is one of the many talents and gifts of Donna Hamilton, who has continually pushed an information management agenda, first in the Consular Bureau in CA/EX [Office of the Executive Director of the Bureau of Consular Affairs] and then when she went to be the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services and now the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in CA.

Donna Hamilton will often say to people: "Why can't we solve this problem, using information management?" You see that attitude now everywhere in the Department. People have been hired who, although they are not computer experts, are computer literate. That has made a huge difference.

Q: Beside the visa information matter, were there any other areas which caused you to concentrate on them?

TRUITT: The issue which began to create incredible problems was the fact that the Department's budget was being cut. This required the Department to reduce substantially the intake of junior officers. For the most part, junior officers are the visa issuing officers of the Department of State. They are it and always have been it. When you cut the annual intake of such officers from 225 to 100, that means that there are 125 fewer officers ready to be assigned to interview people for visas.

Now I had always thought that interviewing people for visas was a wonderful idea for new officers. It was a great, playing-field leveler, with everyone competing for tenure while doing the same kind of work. So you couldn't say that a junior officer was tenured because he or she had gotten a wonderful job, and that person wasn't tenured because he or she had gotten a crappy job. Such assignments also gave these officers an opportunity to interact with a lot of different people from their host countries. In some places, it gave them the ability to understand what was happening economically and politically through that interviewing process.

Q: You're talking about the fact that visa issuance is a very good training program for junior officers.

TRUITT: The intake of junior officers was cut. Then a phenomenon began to appear which I had seen earlier. People were taking longer to get through language training. For example, someone who, you would think, would normally be in language training for four months was suddenly there for six months. We were seeing some very interesting staffing gaps generated by the language training issue and also by this reduced intake of junior officers.

The Department had really pared down the number of junior officers doing visa work. In addition, we had instituted the visa waiver program at many of our large posts. We were seeing a 30 to 40 percent vacancy rate among visa officers. The Department dealt with this problem in a variety of ways, one of which was to recruit heavily in the Civil Service, using funds to cover excursion tours. There was a fairly large program which the Department was developing and to which we were assigning people when I was about to retire in 1995. I think that that was a very good tool and was very helpful in making people in the Civil Service understand the Foreign Service. They also learned how to work in a different environment. We also implemented a very substantial program of hiring dependents, including mainly dependent spouses, assigning them to the full consular program. We had these dependents go for full, two-year tours as visa officers. My forecast on that program, by the way, was that it was going to breed a whole, new level of discontent that the Department would have to deal with in four to six years.

My forecast did not turn out, but I'll tell you about it anyway. I said that we would have an incoming, junior Foreign Service Officer and a dependent spouse. Both would be qualified and trained. They would go off to their first post. Most of them were pretty happy about it. At the second post, the junior Foreign Service Officer would get a new assignment, and the spouse would again be a visa issuing officer. Okay. Again, it's a junior officer job, and the spouse is still a junior officer. However, during the second tour this spouse/dependent probably knows more about visas than any junior officer on the visa line. She is probably getting kind of edgy. By the time the third tour comes up, the spouse would get another one of these visa assignments. The junior officer is now tenured, gets a very different job, and now we've got a very unhappy dependent, who has probably become a pretty good consular officer by this time. They can't get promoted any further, maybe know more than the first tour supervisory officer, and is saying: "Why shouldn't I be in the Foreign Service? Why am I still in this job? Why am I not getting benefits?"

I saw this all as a nice, short-term solution to a problem, but I'm not sure how it's going to play out in the long run. I don't know. However, we did that as well. We had a very large program for hiring dependent spouses as visa officers. We had a very large program of Civil Service people taking excursion tours. We still could not meet all of the demand for visa officers. The good news now is that the Department, in fact, has been able to return to the previous intake of junior Foreign Service Officers.

I said also that we were going to feel the effects later of this reduced intake of junior officers. The consular function felt the impact of this reduced intake, but other functions in the Department would feel it later. We never hired people for fun. We hired them to do jobs at the mid-career level that are very different, perhaps, from the visa line but just as important for the Department. I have no idea how all of this turned out but I thought that it was penny wise and pound foolish to cut down the intake of junior Foreign Service Officers.

Q: Did you find that you were able to get much help from other agencies of the Government? I'm thinking of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] in particular and other agencies which had attachï¿½s abroad. Did this help you at all?

TRUITT: Not a whole lot. The real issue was an internal one, within the Department. It was difficult. You would know that the vacancies created were generally hard to fill or at difficult posts. I used to tell my friends in the Foreign Service: "How would you like to sign up for assignment to the embassy in San Jose, Costa Rica? Would you put off an assignment to the embassy in Manila for that?" They would say: "Well, someone else can go to Manila." Say you saw an interesting group of jobs going unfilled in difficult places. They were being staffed by people who were not traditional, Foreign Service Officers. It was a very interesting mix. There was some discussion of having people from INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] fill some of these vacancies. That did not become a particularly viable program during my tenure in Consular Affairs. It was more of an internal discussion.

In fact, for a long time in the Department, there had been a lot of tension about hiring spouses and dependents. In view of the need for visa officers, it took a lot of the wind out of the sails of people who said that they didn't have any real work to do. So I think that we satisfied this need as I have described.

Q: Well, something that strikes me about what you are saying is that in the old Foreign Service, to which I belonged, you went where you were told to go. I came into the service in 1955. You talk about staffing gaps in Manila. I can understand that when you asked people where they would like to go, and they put down where they would like to go, they might be told: "Well, you are going to go to Manila because we need you there." After all, where you went was not really an option. You were being paid to serve overseas, and you went where you were needed.

TRUITT: All that I can say is that when those cables went out, asking people to volunteer to serve in consular assignments, we listed places like the consulate general in Karachi, Pakistan, and the embassy in Georgetown, Guyana. We never listed London, Paris, and Rome as places to go. It always amused me to watch how staffing was handled.

Q: Did you feel in your job that you could say to someone in the Department: "We need somebody to be assigned to the embassy in Georgetown, Guyana? Please provide somebody."

TRUITT: The reason that I never did that is that I thought that it was terrible to try to jam the junior officer division that way, when I had many friends in senior positions who cavalierly refused assignments that they didn't want. They would say that these were jobs that were beneath them and that they didn't want to do. The system took that kind of attitude very well. I didn't feel that I could say to a peer of mine, as I was also a senior officer: "You should go and do that job." So it was very hard for me to say to people who were below us on the totem pole that they should go. So I just watched the process, rather than saying aggressively: "We need to set a standard here." From my perspective, if we wanted to set a standard applying to the whole Department, we should start at the top, instead of the bottom. I would like to have been able to say: "This is what the top does, and this is what you should do when you are more senior," rather than saying that senior people can pretty well pick and choose what they want to do and where they want to go. However, I thought that this was unfair, so I just watched this process and said nothing. I didn't think that it was fair to say that there needed to be discipline in the Foreign Service, in these circumstances.

Q: Did your office feel any of the pressures from citizens demanding help, including people in jail or having other problems abroad, such as accidents, or who were involved in disasters? Was this handled elsewhere in CA?

TRUITT: It was done primarily in the Office of Overseas Citizen Services. The only time that my office truly became involved in this was when there was a crisis and it had to be handled through a task force and the Operations Center. At which point, I would say to my people: "Well, everybody has to volunteer to do this." I would say: "I know how to do this. I want all of you to volunteer. It is totally imperative now, because the Office of Overseas Citizen Services is only staffed for the day-to-day work. They can't have their people working 16 hours a day, seven days a week. They'll be exhausted. So sign up." When we did this, it came back to me. Occasionally, I also asked some of my officers to go and do this job for a month, because I thought that that struck the right tone. I did this to respond to the task force's request.

Task forces involve really onerous work. When you go up to the large room adjoining the Operations Center on the seventh floor, which is known as Task Force 1, you find that there is a large table at which perhaps 20 people can sit. There is always a head of the task force. There is one consular person who sits there. At times, there are occasionally two or three other rooms in which there are only consular people dealing with the issue. Suppose that it was the hurricane that leveled Jamaica. They would deal with U.S. citizens who were stranded there and handle all of the phone calls coming in on this matter. The situation at Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989 was a fascinating case before that.

Q: This was in China when the Chinese government put down rather bloodily demonstrations against the government. This happened in 1989.

TRUITT: It was 1989, because I can remember the then consul general in Beijing who met with a whole group of people from CA in Italy, after it was over. She was treated like the star of the show because she had been there and had walked in Tiananmen Square.

The consular issues of dealing with U.S. citizens have become so large, and the demand for consular people to be there, has become so intense. You don't necessarily get people from other bureaus who have been consular officers volunteering to assist you at all. So you have to look internally within the Bureau of Consular Affairs and draw people from all parts of the bureau. The questions are: how do you staff the task force from 5:00 PM until midnight, how do you staff it during the day, how you staff it for three shifts over a weekend? There was always a push which everyone felt to find a way to volunteer for that job. I always made sure that my people volunteered.

Sometimes, it was harder for my people because I had general services officers, personnel officers, and information management specialists, none of whom had the basic consular training in what to do. But, anyhow, I would say to them: "Well, just have a little baptism by fire. The worst thing that can happen is that you put the person calling on the telephone on hold and find someone to help you." We always tried to meet that kind of demand.

Q: Well, is there anything else in particular that hit you during this time before you retired?

TRUITT: Yes. What particularly struck me was that it was time to retire. In fact, it was this process of reinventing government, which came off the mischievous plate of President Clinton, when he was trying to reduce the size of the government. I was not old enough to retire the first time I considered retiring. However, the second time I was given an offer to retire, even though I was not old enough, I took it. I said: "This feels right to me."

To me, the Department of State is the most exciting place that you can work in. It is truly what makes the news every night. Every day is different. There is nothing repetitive about working in the Department of State, no matter where you work. However, I realized, when the second invitation to retire was made, that for me it was time, as much as I enjoyed it, to let it go. It was an interesting development to realize that I could make that kind of mind switch, even though I was in a pretty high powered job. It surely was exciting when I didn't know what the next day would bring. But it was good to say that I could retire now. I enjoyed it, knowing that there are so many competent people with whom I had worked. I realized that none of us is indispensable.

I guess that that was one of the things that used to bother me. I felt that I just couldn't leave this job. However, I said to myself: "Come on, there are a few people beside you who can do this." Somebody said to me: "Oh, you just do this job so well." And I would say: "And there will be people after me who will do it better, but who will do it differently." That was the fun of it. One day I realized that it was time to re-think what goes on in my life. Much as I had liked working in the Department, it was time to go and let some other people get involved in doing my job.

So that is what I did. In fact, I retired on the same day as the then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Passport Services, Barry Kiedmauter. Both of us were younger than the established retirement age, but each of us thought that this was a good thing to do. We had other friends in the Foreign Service and the Civil Service who did the same thing. So we just kind of opened it up for other people to get in there and handle things.

Q: Briefly, what have you been doing since you retired?

TRUITT: At the time I retired, I was on the Board of Directors of the State Department Federal Credit Union. I really wanted to be the Chairman of the Board of the Credit Union but did not think that I could give this job the necessary time when I was also a full-time employee of the Department of State. So I retired from the Department on March 31, 1995. The annual elections to the Board of the Credit Union were held two weeks later. I was elected Chairman of the Board of the Credit Union and have been the Chairman ever since. I have become very involved in the two national trade associations which deal with credit union issues. I have now been nominated to the Board of Directors of one of those national trade associations and am running for election to that national board right now. So I have become very involved in the credit union and issues involving the credit union.

That takes up part of my day, every day, and I truly love it. I don't know how long I'll stay with it, but it is truly what I like. I was an economics major in college. I always loved money and banking. When I was in law school, most of my electives were on business issues, so I obviously had some interest in this area that I have since applied. I also am a lawyer and work part time in a law firm in Northern Virginia. I'm also the President of the Senior Seminar Alumni Association.

I also serve on the Board of Directors of a small company, a paying position, in Greenbelt, MD. This is a company that matches wealthy aliens who wish to emigrate to the United States with qualifying investments which allow them to qualify for a visa. The president of this company is Diego Asencio, a retired Foreign Service Officer. He and I sit on a Board of Directors which includes former Congressman Jack Bryant, the older brother of former President George Bush, and a couple of retired ambassadors. I am the only member of the board who is truly a consular professional by background. It is a very large business. We are probably the largest company in the United States involved in this kind of activity. This job allows me to turn my head around in ways that make it possible for me still to keep my hand in the consular business to some extent.

Q: While we're on this subject, because it is included in the immigration question, this idea of having investors come to the United States has been tried in many countries, in order to bring in entrepreneurs and capital. There was an article in the press the other day about people pooling money to qualify for this program. The article suggested that we are not really getting entrepreneurs. Rather, this arrangement is a back door to immigration, at least in some cases. Do you have any problems with this view?

TRUITT: I do not know how each company does its business because there are, perhaps, a dozen companies in the country which are involved in this activity. I know that the basic premise is that the potential immigrants should be investors, not entrepreneurs. To be an investor, they have to invest either in a part of the country where investments are harder to encourage than in other parts or where existing businesses are not considered as robust as other businesses. Or the investments have to be in businesses which had been showing bottom lines which were in the red for a few years and need infusions of cash, which banks are reluctant to provide. Then the most important consideration of all is the number of U.S. citizens employed because the business involved is still in operation. There has to be a certain number of full time, U.S. citizens or legal, permanent residents in which the potential immigrant invests. That doesn't mean necessarily that the potential immigrant is an entrepreneur. What it means is that he or she has enough money to help a business remain afloat, in view of the number of jobs involved.

We have funded the Sun Lives buildings that are here. Major investors have come here as immigrants and have made substantial investments in the Sun Lives program, when banks wouldn't touch it. They are now thriving businesses in this area. We have also been major investors in Fuddruckers, a restaurant chain in the United States. There is one company that I personally know in Springfield, VA, a hotel which desperately needed an infusion of cash. In fact, one of our investors did that. He knew nothing about the hotel, but it is flourishing now. So that is what we have done.

I can't speak for other businesses, nor can I say that these people were necessarily entrepreneurs. Some of them are just incredibly wealthy people. They want to come to live in the United States for a variety of reasons. They may be very wealthy but they may not be considered the crï¿½me de la crï¿½me, socially. There are a lot of people who live in Japan who are not Japanese citizens. In fact, they are wealthy Koreans. Their children cannot go to the finest schools in Japan. However, everyone comes in the family, including husband, wife, and all of the children. Many people come to this country so that their children can go to school here. Some people come because they just want to play golf in Hawaii. They don't want the hassle of living elsewhere. They are just happy to be intending immigrants. This is what their investment in the United States is all about. It's a relative term. So it's a real potpourri of people who come to the U.S. Some of them know, in fact, that they would have to wait up to 10 years before their immigrant visa number would come up. But they are multi-millionaires, so why shouldn't they take advantage of it?

This program has involved a real mix of people from all over the world. A lot of them are from the Far East. Some are from Europe and others from South America. They just know that the investment tool is here. We find that there are a lot of consular officers who are desperately opposed to this program. They say: "Why should these people be able to 'buy' their way into the United States?" Well, better that than coming into the country with no skills at all. You don't know what it's like when you don't have a job. These investors could at least save the jobs of 15 people on a catfish farm. You may laugh, but those 15 people are glad to have a job. I don't want to be a super advocate of this program, but I've seen this from both sides.

Q: I don't have any problem with it because we are a mixed bag in the United States. We have profited in different ways by people coming in and bringing one thing or another. This sounds perfectly legitimate. It's much better than coming in as the relative of somebody who is not really making much of a contribution to the United States.

TRUITT: My favorite case is one I dealt with in my professional capacity as a lawyer. This involved a U.S. citizen whose son was in Cuba and married. His son divorced his wife to qualify to come to the United States as the unmarried son of this U.S. citizen. He could not come previously. So he very happily left his wife in Cuba and came to the United States. I said to this American citizen: "Is it better to have destroyed your son's marriage? Is that a more worthy cause than an investor who is creating jobs for U.S. citizens?" He said: "We have no problem. This is an unmarried son of an American citizen." I said: "You have no idea of the chaos you left behind in Cuba with his wife and children, so that he could be an unmarried son." However, I said: "This is not a thing of value to you. That's the law, and that visa could properly be issued to your son." I said: "That's what Congress said. I am not here to make value judgments. I don't think that people at ports of entry should be making value judgments, either." You can say it's not wholesome, but Congress just said that it's legal. That's probably the lawyer in me talking. [Laughter]

Q: Okay, Michelle, I guess that that wraps it up.

TRUITT: I think that we've done it.

Q: Great. Thank you.

End of interview